

Ulf G. Ahlborg: His role in the WHO programme on the health risk assessment of PCBs, PCDDs and PCDFs.

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In February 1996 the news of the death of Professor Ulf G. Ahlborg was received with great sadness. Ulf's death meant a great loss for the WHO programme on the health risk assessment of PCBs, PCDDs, PCDFs. Ulf Ahlborg played a prominent role in this programme, and his impressive knowledge of the field coupled with his great enthusiasm and sincere commitment were of major importance and were greatly appreciated.

Over the last few years the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO) has coordinated this programme in collaboration with the WHO International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) and other international and national organizations. This programme aims at assessing, evaluating and minimizing the possible health risks of exposure to PCBs, PCDDs, and PCDFs. It comprises exposure assessment (field) studies in combination with the quality assessment of the participating analytical laboratories, the health risk assessment for adults as well as for infants, and the derivation of internationally agreed Toxic Equivalency Factors (TEFs) for this group of lipophilic, persistent environmental contaminants.

Ulf Ahlborg played a central and crucial role in almost all the areas within this WHO programme, and his activities in the field of the health risk assessment were particularly well known. In 1990 he chaired the important WHO Consultation on the Tolerable Daily Intake from Food of PCDDs and PCDFs, that led to the derivation of the TDI of 10 pg/kg b.w. for 2,3,7,8-TCDD¹⁾. In November 1995 he chaired a meeting of a WHO Working Group on the Assessment of the Health Risk for Infants from Exposure to PCDDs, PCDFs and PCBs. The finalization of the report of that meeting is hampered now by his absence and the lack of his valuable contribution. Relatively recently Ulf joined the coordinating committee of the WHO quality assessment study in order to bridge the gap between the views of analytical chemists and toxicologists. His contribution to that activity is acknowledged with great gratitude. In addition to these activities he provided a couple of valuable working documents for the meeting of the working group on PCBs, PCDDs, and PCDFs within the framework of the update and revision of the WHO Air Quality Guidelines for Europe.

His work on the harmonized approach towards setting internationally agreed TEFs for dioxin-like PCBs^{2,3)}, and his recent activities on the extension of the database, in order to derive harmonized TEFs also for the PCDDs and PCDFs, were greatly appreciated and widely accepted. Unfortunately, attending the planning meeting on this subject in November 1995, in Rungsted Kyst, Denmark, was his last formal WHO appointment. He chaired that meeting as we expected: sometimes seeking the

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scientific confrontation, but always trying to solve the difficulties, and, in the end, always searching for the compromise.

Ulf Ahlborg was a great scientist, with an irreplaceable expertise in the field of the health risk assessment of PCBs, PCDDs, and PCDFs. He was also warm-hearted and friendly, and possessed a great sense of humour. This combination of characteristics together with his ability to enjoy life made him a good colleague and a very pleasant person to know. Indeed, for many of us he was a good friend. We miss him already and we certainly will miss him in the years to come.

Ulf contributed extensively to the work of WHO, and he played a key role in the development of the dioxin programme. It will be extremely difficult to fill the place he left behind. WHO owes him a great deal, and it is therefore, that we would like to dedicate this symposium on the WHO activities in the field of the health risk assessment of dioxins and related compounds to the memory of our good friend and colleague Ulf G. Ahlborg.

REFERENCES

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