

In Memoriam – Robert Kroes

Professor Robert Kroes died on 28th December 2006 after a severe battle with cancer at an age of 66 years. With his passing, a central pillar in international toxicology has crumbled. Bobby, as everyone knew him, had an exceptional professional career and was an exceptional person.

His basic training in The Netherlands was in veterinary medicine and veterinary pathology. He obtained his DVM in 1960 and PhD in 1970. He then became a certified toxicologist in 1988 and a certified laboratory animal pathologist in 1989. From 1972-77 he was head of the Department of Oncology at the National Institute of Public Health (which later became the RIVM) in The Netherlands. Thereafter, he was appointed Deputy Director at the Central Institute for Food and Nutrition Research (CIVO-TNO). In 1980 he became the CIVO-TNO Director until when he in 1983 moved back to the RIVM and where he in 1989 became its Deputy Director-General. In 1988 Bobby was appointed part-time Professor in Biological Toxicology at the Research Institute for Toxicology (RITOX), University of Utrecht. He stepped down from RIVM in 1995 to take over as Scientific Director of an Interfaculty Institute for Risk Assessment Sciences (IRAS) at the University of Utrecht. Bobby retired from this position at IRAS in 2005 and was until his death Chairman of its Advisory Board of IRAS and Emeritus Professor. After his retirement from IRAS, Bobby had acted as a private consultant in toxicology and risk assessment.

Bobby had a very distinguished scientific career with a publication list containing more than 200 entries. He was a member of editorial boards of 10 scientific journals and had been Editor-in-Chief of Human & Experimental Toxicology. His scientific interests were in many areas of toxicology, oncology, risk assessment and environment- and health-related issues. Particularly noted have been his contributions to risk assessment of chemicals in food, including addressing methodological issues. He also held many central positions in research administrative groupings, a very important one was as Programme Co-ordinator for the European Science Foundation (EFS) Programme on Environment and Health in 1995-99.

Bobby had enormous impact on international regulatory toxicology and environmental health through his participation in a very large number of expert groups. He served as chair or member of more than 40 scientific committees appointed by WHO EURO, WHO/IPCS, WHO/IARC, WHO/FAO, OECD, EU, and ILSI.

Bobby was also a very central figure in international toxicological societies. He served as President of EUROTOX 2002-2004 and was Past President 2004-2006. Bobby was elected as President Elect of IUTOX 2004-2007, but unfortunately would not live to take on the office as IUTOX President in July 2007. Bobby also became internationally widely known through his function as President of ILSI (International Life Sciences Institute) Europe in 1999-2005.

In addition to all his great qualities as a toxicological scientist and risk assessor, Bobby was a very likeable person. He was always enthusiastic, charming and witty. It was very enjoyable to listen to him, either as a lecturer in a big auditorium, in a smaller group or in a one-on-one situation. He always gave very much of himself to others. I believe everyone who was present at his last scientific presentation during EUROTOX 2006 in Cavtat, Croatia will remember Bobby's willingness to serve and contribute, even if he at that time was obviously marked by his severe illness. Bobby loved life and got very much out of it. Very sadly, he did not get enough time to enjoy it even more.

Erik Dybing