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# In memoriam: dr william john paget

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Dr William John Paget, a Senior Scientist at the Netherlands Institute for Health Services Research (Nivel) and one of the principal investigators for PROMISE (Preparing for RSV Immunization and Surveillance in Europe), sadly and unexpectedly passed away on November 4, 2023. He was a connector always full of research ideas. In the many condolences memorizing John, the full breadth of his character and how he operated can be found: kind, always with a smile, competent, diplomatic, positive, curious, open-minded, collaborative, contagiously enthusiastic and passionate. This really reflects how many who worked with him recognize and remember John. Still, it is challenging to describe how his vibrant personality contributed to countless very successful projects on surveillance and research on infectious diseases, most of them in the context of European or Global Public Health themes.

John was born as a first child in the Paget family living in London, November 8, 1964. At a young age, he moved with his family to Geneva, Switzerland where he learned to speak French fluently. He went to the London School of Economics for his bachelor, but the choice of his master showed his real interest: medical demography and epidemiology. After three years working at the Global AIDS Programme of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva and eight years at the Epidemiology section of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (SFOPH) in Bern, he moved in 2000 to Nivel in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Before completing his PhD on the surveillance and epidemiology of sexually transmitted diseases in Switzerland (University of Basel)[1], John started in April 2000 as project leader of the European Influenza Surveillance Scheme (EISS) at Nivel. He had the perfect background – a broad experience in research and policymaking in combination with fine diplomatic skills. Before his arrival, EISS was a

loose group of ´crazy´ influenza experts from seven countries in North-West Europe. Within two years he built a strong, internet-based infrastructure, developed the weekly, highly respected, electronic influenza bulletin with over a million followers and he initiated a production line of scientific papers, which is still being continued today [2-4]. With extraordinary diplomacy, creative problem-solving and language skills, John managed to align the EISS organization between multiple countries, especially France (with IT support, Paul Taylor) and the United Kingdom (UK) (WHO Collaborating Centre for influenza, Alan Hay), and by attracting the coordinator of the EISS virology section (Adam Meijer) from a Public Health Institute in the Netherlands. Furthermore, John involved local general practice (GP) representatives like Douglas Fleming (Birmingham, UK), Jean-Marie Cohen, Open-Rome (Paris, France) and Aad Bartelds (Nivel, the Netherlands), who enriched the collaboration between epidemiologists and virologists. In no time, EISS got the attention of the European Commission for developing pandemic preparedness plans, as the threat of an avian influenza pandemic with the reemergence of H5N1 in 2003 was imminent. In the meantime, the number of participating countries grew from seven to 33, making EISS the largest and most innovative surveillance network in Europe. It was a combination of well-coordinated epidemiological (through GP-based sentinel networks), virological (through participating laboratories) and GP networks [5,6]. Within EISS, John initiated many projects to harmonize the assessment of the size and spread of influenza epidemics during which methods were developed that are still being used. The funding of EISS was growing at high speed and therefore the project team and the international network of John. He incorporated this extra work unbelievably smoothly in the daily routine. The annual meetings of over 120 scientists from all participating countries at locations across Europe were extremely popular not just for scientific networking but also for building everlasting friendships.

During that period, John was the creative strongman of EISS, he was at his best initiating the many research projects within EISS and he loved it. John was already exploring expanding EISS to countries in the WHO European region neighboring the European Union. EISS eventually moved to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) in 2008, and this move urged John to tap into new programs and resources at Nivel. He steadily developed his own international infectious diseases group and expanded his network and disciplinary horizon again in multiple directions, geographically as well as scientifically. He joined the Amphi infectious disease research group at Radboud University Medical Centre for some years. At the same time, he kept and further developed the productive relationships with ECDC and WHO Europe and Global influenza teams. His contributions to cross-national influenza research were beyond par [7-9]. Most recently, he was extremely successful initiating projects on respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) epidemiology, disease burden and antimicrobial resistance [10-13]. As he was already interested in RSV during the EISS period, he brilliantly used the old EISS influenza weekly bulletin approach to develop the bi-weekly European PROMISE RSV surveillance bulletin[14,15]. John also became a renowned speaker at prestigious conferences around the globe and an invaluable and rare translator between virologists, epidemiologists and social scientists [16]. He was on top of new developments with global significance, timely and contemporary (e.g. the possible extinction of influenza B/Yamagata virus [17), yet, simultaneously, he was equally committed to revisit historic pandemics (like the 1918 influenza mortality burden [18]). At Nivel, John lead and participated in numerous international projects, for which he as the indisputable grandmaster of highly infectious project names, produced a stream of acronyms (BIRD, GERi, RSV ComNet, FluCov), that traveled further via his ever-growing group of colleagues in project meetings, conferences and publications. In terms of his contribution to the world of respiratory virus surveillance and control, we would call him legendary, in his personality and his professional achievements

You might wonder why someone as talented and bright as John liked to work at Nivel, a fairly small research institute in the Netherlands and not at a top university or international body. John once

explained: ´it is the balance between the academic freedom and the idea of working in a friendly atmosphere, surrounding Nivel, that I like so much´. Nivel also gave him the opportunity to work on epidemiological research questions regarding respiratory infections, infectious diseases in general, antimicrobial resistance and rare diseases. John explained: ´this diversity makes my work interesting and fun´. He enjoyed working with young ambitious people, preferably doing a PhD. He also became chairman of the workers' council of Nivel, where his mediator skills and positive criticism were useful. He was hard on content, soft on relationships. He could be very critical on certain developments in the world and in his work (which he expressed during a beer after work in a ´bruin café´, a typical small local Dutch pub, or in the evening at a conference) but would never attack people directly.

We say farewell to a great researcher and a super social and modest man dedicated to make the world a better place. He leaves behind his wife Dineke and his children – Max, Daan and Marieke – but also his mother, brother and extended family. We cannot yet believe John has left us, but we do believe he was an inspiration to all of us pushing our research forward. We thank John so much for all he has given us during his too short life. Let him rest in peace, our big friendly giant.

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