

Biography: Hein J Wellens MD



Hein J. Wellens, MD was born November 13, 1935 in The Hague in the Netherlands. He studied medicine at the University of Leiden.

In the late sixties, at the University Hospital of Amsterdam, he started applying cardiac catheterization techniques, placing catheters into the heart for recording of cardiac activation at different sites. Then, connecting catheters to a pacing device, he showed that it was possible not only to initiate and terminate the clinically occurring cardiac arrhythmias but also to localize the site of origin of the arrhythmia and to define the arrhythmia mechanism. Using this approach, of programmed electrical stimulation of the heart, Dr. Wellens unravelled

the mechanisms and origins of of arrhythmias in the Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, and other types of supra ventricular tachycardias. This fundamental and seminal work became the basis for the field of interventional electrophysiology that going strong more than forty years later.

In the early seventies, he courageously extended his work to the study of ventricular tachycardia, demonstrating that programmed electrical stimulation of the heart could also be used to study the mechanism and localization of ventricular tachycardia, work that was critical to the development of therapies for these arrhythmias.

It quickly became clear that this new approach allowed the investigation of the effect of drugs on the tachycardia mechanism and the development of new therapeutic strategies such as the termination of tachycardias by specially designed pacemakers, the surgical removal or isolation of the tachycardia substrate and ultimately cure from cardiac arrhythmias by catheter ablation.

Dr. Wellens seminal body of work is essentially the basis for the way arrhythmias are currently diagnosed and treated in the electrophysiology laboratory today. But, more than that, he applied each new insight from invasive cardiac studies, to better refine our understanding of the electrocardiogram, developing new ways to use the electrocardiographic analysis to understand pathophysiology and improve patient care.

In 1973 Dr. Wellens was appointed Professor of Cardiology at the University of Amsterdam. In 1977 he left Amsterdam to become Professor and Chairman of the Department of Cardiology at the Academic Hospital of the new Maastricht University. There he created a world renowned school of arrhythmology. Between 1977 and 2001 more than 130 cardiologists from all over the world spent fellowships and sabbaticals in this stimulating environment. Many of them, after returning to their home country, became internationally known leaders in cardiology.

There are many other contributions. From 1993 to 2003 he directed the Interuniversity Cardiological Institute of the Netherlands (ICIN), an

Institute of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, in which the Dutch research activities in cardiovascular research are combined at the national level. He has over 590 peer-reviewed articles, 252 chapters in books, and is author or (co) editor of 19 books on cardiology.

He is a superb communicator and educator and a wonderful, warm person. It is a distinct honor to have him as our 20th Gordon K. Moe lecturer.