

EASL Awardee 2007

Professor Christian Trépo, MD, PhD
Science is a joy for me
Lyon is the place to be



Christian Trépo has lived and worked for almost 40 years in Lyon. Christian Trépo and Lyon have special ties, which go, this time not to the heart, but to the liver and to the hepatitis virus family.

When a man marries a mammalian virus, all he needs is money and manpower. But when a researcher reaches this point in his career, he deserves recognition and reflection. So, this year Christian Trépo will receive the recognition from EASL and for an old friend from EuroHep it is a pleasure to reflect on his achievements.

Christian Trépo, the scientist in three and a half decades. We saw him often as the soft-spoken lecturer, speaking about his research and extrapolating its results to the practice of medicine and the development of academic research. An amazing number of publications, followed the presentations: 1970–75: 28; 1976–85: 94; 1985–95: 216; 1996–2005: 291. What will the number be by the next decade?

What was the work of Christian Trépo, the young scientist in his first decade, between 1970 and 1975?

In his first publication in 1970 from Lyon he immediately was the last author in a clinical trial of sulpiride in ulcer diseases. In the same year he also had the first report on Australian antigen, hepatitis B virus, and periarteritis nodosa, his first discovery. Shortly thereafter he moved to the kingdom of Australia antigen, with a Prince in the New York blood center and into hepatitis B-immunology with animals resembling patients: chimpanzees. He became the world expert on Australia antigen, immune complexes, and polyarteritis nodosa. His journal of choice went from the *French Lyon Medicale* to the *English Journal of Clinical Pathology*. Between 1976 and 1985 Christian Trépo became an established scientist. He was back in France, in Lyon to be precise. But he continued collaborations with New York, with stars in hepatitis B epidemiology and vaccine testing Beasley and Szmuness; in addition, collaboration with Paris-based scientists was initiated, both in laboratory (Tiollais) and clinical research (Benhamou). His big scientific appetite is reflected in the many topics he addressed in 94 manuscripts: Three viruses; HBV, non-A, non-B, and Delta, the latter with Italian investigators. He introduced the woodchuck for hepatitis B research in Europe, and was among the first to study nucleoside analogs, and to describe the potential for severe toxicity. Some publications reached *The Lancet* and *The New England Journal of Medicine*, helpful ingredients to become a Professor of Medicine. Between 1986 and 1995 Professor Trépo developed into an ambitious scientist. He created a firm base in Lyon with excellent co-workers, among others Zoulim, Vitvitski, Hantz, and Bizollon. He participated in French co-operative studies and joined the EuroHep program. Two more viruses: HIV and HCV were added to the scientific focus. Nude mice and Pekin ducks were used as recipients of hepadna virus. A major contribution was the development of a cell culture system that allowed the hepatitis B virus to grow, and antivirals to be tested. Efficacy of several compounds was demonstrated but also warnings for toxicity went out. At a scientifically late stage he became interested in interferon and participated in clinical studies. Key publications were on triple therapy with steroids, antivirals, and plasma exchange in

periarteritis nodosa and in the laboratory on prolonged replication of HBV replication in duck hepatocytes. Given the many submissions, the virology and hepatology journals began to learn by heart the address of INSERM unit at the Cours Albert in Lyon, France. In the most recent decade, Christian Trépo has become an amiable director scientist. He is both Chief of Hepatogastroenterology and Director of the hepatitis virus INSERM research unit. He has expanded collaborations, started the HENCORE group, is a member of EUROHEPATITIS, and participated in the global Hepatitis Intervention Trial (HIT) group. All hepatitis viruses are now studied, including co-infection with HIV. Ducks, woodchucks and mice are being used next to *in vitro* cell culture systems. Interferon, nucleoside analogs, DNA vaccine, and other sophisticated biotechnology products have been assessed by the Trépo group. Growing big takes its toll. First authorship is dwindling; prestigious co-workers are becoming last author and the director now takes the penultimate position. Modern career development requires publications, so the preferred journal becomes the journal that accepts the paper. INSERM and university leadership asks for accountability of their funds, so the patent registry becomes a focus of attention.

And all this has been done by Christian Trépo, who admirably kept his hobbies and his “copains”. So, before the real award has been given, we should end this reflection on Christian Trépo with a French prayer for wise, important men about to turn sixty:

Mon Dieu,
Donnez-lui une longue vie,
Du travail pas trop souvent,
De l’amour de temps en temps,
Mais la Science du Foie tout le temps.

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