

A Giant Lying Beneath a Small Gravestone in the Corner of a Garden

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ICSH-Asia

Dr. R.M. Rowan is a consultant doctor of Glasgow Royal Infirmary as well as a physician and educator knowledgeable of hematological laboratory tests in his capacity as Head of the Hematology Section of Glasgow Western Infirmary and Senior Lecturer of Glasgow University. "Cell Volume Analysis" (Albert Clark and Co., Ltd., London, 1983) and "Automation and Quality Assurance in Haematology" (Blackwell Scientific Publication, Boston, 1986) were the first books to introduce precision measurements of blood cell volume to the world, and remain brilliant books still being used as textbooks for students today. Later, he published successive papers on the advanced laboratory tests of the day including automated analysis of cell morphology, attracting attention from all over the world.

Viewed from the island of Japan in the Far East of the globe, Dr. Rowan is not only a great hematologist, but is also well-known as the leader who promoted the international standardization of automated blood analysis in Japan as well as Asia. Looking back, the period from 1960 through 2000 was the period of progress in automated assessments of blood. This period corresponds to the time when various methods were developed quickly and successively, beginning with Mr. W. Coulter's development of the automated analysis of blood cell count and blood cell volume by the electrical resistance method, automated measurement of hemoglobin, and automated measurements of red blood cell indices and platelet count, establishing complete blood count as a basic test for clinicians. Red blood cell volume distribution, platelet volume distribution, trimodal distribution of white blood cells, five-part differential of white blood cells, and automated analysis of reticulocytes were established, elucidating valuable clinical information. Immunological flow cytometry was invented, and the automated optical five-part differentiation of white blood cells was completed. It should be remembered that behind such technological innovations accomplished within a short period of 40 years were the energetic activities of the International Council for Standardization in Haematology (ICSH).

With Mr. S.M. Lewis as its top leader, the ICSH gathered then internationally eminent hematologists, such as B.S. Bull, J.M. England, A. Groner, A. Richardson-Jones, J.A. Koepke, R.V. Pierre, N.K. Shinton, R. Thom, O.W. van Assendelft, and R.L. Verwilghen, and Dr. Rowan kept the ICSH together as its Secretary in Chief. The Council created various international standards involved in automated measurements of blood cells, and they are employed as the standards for the current blood analyzers. Dr. Rowan's superb administration at the ICSH was praised in various circles. This trend of the ICSH's activities produced the references in the hematology area of the National Committee for Clinical Laboratory Standards (NCCLS) in the United States and, in Asia, led to the founding of the Japanese Society for Laboratory Hematology, the Clinical Laboratory Standardization Center (CLSC) in Thailand, the Korean Association of Quality Assurance for Clinical Laboratory, and the Asian Network of Clinical Standardization (ANCLS). It was Dr. Rowan who provided indirect support.

Never without a smile, Dr. Rowan's well-rounded personality always calmed the feeling of members excited by agitating discussions. Carried in his bag to every meeting was a bottle of the world famous Glenfiddich, and the memory of the all-night long talks we had after dinner until dawn with a glass in hand remains engraved in my mind. He smuggled with him some whisky when he was hospitalized for cancer, and I received several e-mails from him saying, "Let's have a drink together when I get well." He also gave me a pewter cup called "the highland quaich," for drinking with good friends, which is still shining in my ornament cabinet. Mr. K. Fujimoto of Sysmex Corporation showed me a photo of Dr. Rowan's grave. It was sited in his favorite garden, endearingly decorated with flowers. The photo spoke to me, "We'll have a drink together later in heaven." The passing away of Dr. Rowan, who always gave me his warm hand when I was discouraged, has left a big hole in my heart.