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Obituary – Erich Saling (1925–2021)

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Erich Saling, the ‘father of Perinatology’ passed away on November 6, 2021. We would like to offer our deepest sympathy to his family, colleagues and friends. He left a special place in the hearts of all that knew him. He will be missed by us all.

Erich Saling studied medicine in Jena and Berlin and received his doctorate from the Free University of Berlin. He then pursued further professional training as obstetrician and gynecologist from 1952 to 1958 at Städtische Frauenklinik Berlin-Neukölln. In 1963, he presented his post-doctoral thesis on ‘The Ratios of Blood Gas and the Acid–Base Balance of a Fetus in the Course of an Unimpaired Birth’. Saling continued to become an adjunct professor at the Free University of Berlin in 1968. In 1979 he was appointed as head of the newly formed Department of Obstetrics at the Frauenklinik Neukölln, and became a full professor in perinatal medicine at the Free University of Berlin in the same year. Erich retired from clinical practice in 1991, after 38 years of practicing perinatology, but he remained as the leader of the Erich Saling Institute of Perinatal Medicine in Berlin.

The title of the book which Erich Saling is best known globally is ‘Das Kind im Bereich der Geburtshilfe’ (The Child in the Field of Obstetrics). The theme of the book reflects the scientific interest underlying Erich Saling’s life as medical doctor and scientist. Initially his scientific

interest focused on the diagnosis and treatment of the depressed neonate, with its first publication on this subject in 1958 and 1959. His over 60 years of scientific work focused on the diagnosis of intrauterine oxygen deficiency, avoidance of preterm delivery and growth restriction; and management of breech presentation. Amongst his greatest ideas was that of taking a blood sample from the fetus during birth (Saling Technique) for the clinical obstetrics and for scientific studies about physiological and patio-physiological factors during birth. With this method he broke a tabu of the untouchable endocervical canal during pregnancy and labor. The pioneer Erich Saling reaped a lot of criticism, but he gained many admirers, students, and friends, too. This was the start from the mother-oriented to the fetus-oriented obstetrics and of the new sub-speciality Perinatal Medicine (Feto-Maternal Medicine) and structural changes in Obstetrics and Gynecology.

With Erich Saling’s activities the German Society of Perinatal Medicine was founded, along with subsidiary societies all over the world, and pediatricians were invited to cooperate with obstetricians in scientific discourse. This collaboration was continued by him with the foundation of the Journal of Perinatal Medicine and is now being practiced globally with focus on improving perinatal outcomes. During the last 50 years many national and international societies of perinatal medicine were founded, like the ‘World Association of Perinatal Medicine’ (WAPM) and the ‘International Academy of Perinatal Medicine’ (IAPM). The IAPM was formed 2005 from the WAPM, the International Society Fetus as a Patient and the ‘European Society of Perinatal Medicine’. This international board, the IAPM with 30 permanent fellows from all over the world seven as a forum for the assessment and discussion of worldwide perinatal medicine with the life-long president Erich Saling.

Erich Saling’s life was a series of successes and many honors. His honors are too many to mention. He was the Honorary President of the German Society of Perinatal Medicine, Honorary Member of the German Society of Gynäkologe and Obstetrics. He received the Carl-Kaufmann-Medal of this Society, the Fellowship ad eundem of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Ernst-Reuter-Medal of the Senat of Berlin, the Lilly-Medal of ‘The Fetus as a Patient’, the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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Anyone who was lucky enough to have known Erich Saling knew that he was the very best our profession has to offer. He was an exceptional investigator, clinician, pioneer, and human being. I am personally connected with him since I first met him in 1965 as my ‘doctor-father’ and as his doctoral-student. I have the highest respect for

Erich Saling not only as my teacher and scientific mentor but also as an exceptional and human being.

My thoughts are with his family.

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