

EDITORIAL ΑΡΘΡΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΞΗΣ

The birth of the European Association of Professors Emeriti

At the recent Founding Congress of the European Association of Professors Emeriti¹ the by-laws was approved which has the following incipit: *"We believe that a university professor is called to continue his vocation as an educator, counselor and researcher for life. Especially in these difficult times, the emeriti and retired professors offer their aid to their still active colleagues and to society in general on a voluntary and public benefit pro bono basis"*. Emeriti professors represent an acknowledged category of retired professors. As Derek de Solla Price wrote in 1963² *"Any retiring scientist looking back at the end of his career upon a normal life span, will find that 80 to 90% of the scientific work has taken place before his very eyes"*. So these professors possess a precious capital of knowledge distilled through their lifelong critical perception. Furthermore, it is now known that teams composed of young scientists (they provide innovation) and old scientists provide epochal ideas when directed by young people.³

Two recent papers^{4,5} dealing with an inquiry in 20 countries of high, middle and low growth have demonstrated that clinical professors, emeriti or pensioned, continue to work hard, even when they do not have an office or laboratory. More than 40% of them have produced a paper or a book of impact, and more than 50% continue teach at all levels. There are a few countries which do not nominate professors emeriti, and in others their nomination does not foresee benefits (other than a typical honorary title). Usually professors emeriti continue to work in the departments where they were active. In the USA, age is not an indicator for pensioning, although cardiac infarction may be. In France, they are nominated for a limited, but renewable period of time. In Germany, professors emeriti were no longer nominated for a while, but today there is more freedom for the individual university to award emeriti of excellence, with a view to maintaining the *"human capital of age"*. In Italy at the Second University of

Naples professors emeriti can conduct research, while at the universities of Catanzaro, Chieti and Campus Biomedico this privilege is not foreseen. In Greece, at the universities of Athens and Thessaloniki, professors emeriti are foreseen in the constitution, and in both universities associations of professors emeriti have been founded and activated. As a result of their efforts and those of the representatives of 14 European countries it was possible to give birth to the European Association for Professors Emeriti.

A recent study of Ehrich and colleagues⁶ on retired professors of pediatrics in Europe, which was presented ahead of publication in the *Journal of Pediatrics*, reported *"that retired professors tend to play a marginal role in the academic life of university children's hospitals of the majority of 28 representative European countries. This lack of integration contrasts with the potential of retired professors of pediatrics concerning knowledge and experience in supporting child health care services and in developing strategies for coping with the crisis of child health care. We conclude that the medical faculties should develop career pathways for senior academic pediatricians⁶ and that the Council of Europe and the European Commission should start an initiative on empowering emeriti in pediatrics in Europe to act as promoters for the well-being of children"*.

As discussed by Dennis V. Cokkinos *"University professors who retire from their position in current times, whether designated emeriti or not, have still a lot to offer to their alma mater, their country and to our society in general"*. *"The unity of the old and young generation..."* said Dr Prokopios Pavlopoulos, President of the Hellenic Republic and Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of Athens, *"...is a prerequisite for the existence of Europe and for the fulfillment of her mission"*.

The Athens founding conference was preceded by a meeting in Naples *"The human capital of age"* pointing to unity of the two cultures. It was attended by presidents of universities, deans, retired and emeriti professors, historians, historians of medicine and of science, philosophers, politicians, neurologists and neuro-radiologists, internists, gerontologists, nephrologists (who care for patients who become old when they are young), the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish Community in Rome, the Cardinal of Naples,

the President of the Pontiff Academy of Science in Rome, physiologists and philosophers of science. Talks were given by mathematicians, experts of Patriarch trees and on life in the sea, and in space. Various speakers were present in both Naples and Athens, ensuring a thread of cultural continuity between the events.

Age is not synonymous with intellectual decadence if one is healthy and not afflicted by disease. As Rita Levi-Montalcini pointed out,⁷ creativity is not age dependent. She analyzed the later contributions of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), David Ben Gurion (1866–1973), and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973).

On the other hand aging, paradoxically, may be associated with better mental health (*“like wine and cheese one’s mental health improved with age”*), as demonstrated by a recent by the group of study of Dilip Jeste, since old people get wiser depression is not the rule unless a person is affected by a serious disease.⁸ Indeed, as demonstrated by Sinatra and colleagues recently in *Science*,⁹ aging does not prevent scientific breakthroughs; in fact *“the highest-impact work in a scientist’s career is randomly distributed within his(her) body of work. That is, the highest-impact work can be, with the same probability, anywhere in the sequence of papers published by a scientist – it could be the first publication, could appear mid-career, or could be a scientist’s last publication. This random-impact rule holds true for scientists in different disciplines, with different career lengths, working in different decades, and publishing solo or with teams, and whether credit is assigned uniformly or unevenly among collaborators”*.⁹

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