

IN MEMORIAM
Asmund S. Laerdal

October 11, 1913 - November 19, 1981

Asmund S. Laerdal of Stavanger, Norway, creator and leader of the Laerdal Company of "Teaching Aids and Equipment for Emergency Medicine" died on November 19, 1981, after a prolonged illness. At the funeral services on Thanksgiving Day, his friends thanked him for what he has given the world in general and critical care medicine in particular.

Mr. Laerdal started a small printing business in Stavanger in 1940 and, during Nazi occupation and in spite of threats to his life, continued to print children's books, toys and patriotic documents. In the 1950s he became an expert in the use of plastics. As a self-made designer and innovator he made a unique children's doll "Annie", the forerunner of the resuscitation manikin. When Norwegian physicians brought to his attention new data on the efficacy of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation (NEJM 258:671, 1958; JAMA 167, 1958) he developed a prototype of a mouth-to-mouth training manikin which he presented for input to the American Red Cross and CPR researchers at Baltimore City Hospital in 1959. After the documentation of the efficacy of external cardiac resuscitation (JAMA 173:1064, 1960) he visited CPR researchers in the USA, the founding members of the American Heart Association CPR Committee. This led to the further development of the mouth-to-mouth manikin into the Resusci-Anne CPR manikin, which is being used in all countries of the world. Then followed a novel recording manikin, a new self-refilling bag-valve-mask unit, and many other innovations and improvements of resuscitation and respiratory care equipment and concepts. Laerdal also devised an ingenious audiovisual self-training system for learning lifesupporting first aid and CPR with minimal dependence on instructors.

A small-scale toy manufacturing company thus was transformed into a large-scale, medical devices company with worldwide impact. Without Laerdal products CPR would never have been implemented as rapidly and as broadly as it was, and would never have reached the lay public, the vital first link in the chain of life support. Laerdal's innovations became possible because of his unique responsiveness to needs, opportunities, research data and international recommendations. Although not medically trained, he understood physicians and researchers and in turn taught them about the possibilities and limitations of manufacturing and marketing.

Asmund Laerdal, however, was much more than a designer, manufacturer and businessman. He initiated and supported international and American resuscitation guidelines' symposia, and became a patron behind the scenes of numerous important gatherings which affected the development of resuscitation worldwide. He helped bring together initiators of resuscitation and intensive care from various countries and continents. In recent years he focused on public education in first aid and resuscitation, and on the needs of developing countries.

Asmund Laerdal instinctively appreciated the fact that the life blood of progress is research. He appreciated imagination, as well as a systematic documentative search for the truth. Catalyzing donations since the 1960s, which helped several important developments in critical care, were followed recently by the establishment of "The Laerdal Foundation for Acute Medicine". He wants us to continue stressing practically important topics in research, and simplicity, realism and reaching the masses in education.

His quiet determination, visionary advice, patronage and personal kindness will be particularly missed by past and present leaders of medical organizations of which he was a member: The Society of Critical Care Medicine; the Wolf Creek Club of CPR Researchers; the CPR Committee of the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists; the Club of Mainz on Emergency and Disaster Medicine Worldwide; the American Heart Association; and the Scandinavian Society of Anesthesiologists. The last 3 and the University of Pittsburgh honored

him in recent years.

He wisely provided for continuity of his worldwide impact by turning over to his capable son, Tore Laerdal, the continuance and growing impact of his Company and his broader visions. Asmund is also survived by his son Age, a physician in Norway, his daughter Astrid, and his wife Magga who contributed to his success through her patience and hospitality.

Millions have benefitted from Laerdal's products and thousands from his thoughts, but sadly, too few of us have known the great man behind those piercing blue eyes.

Peter Safar, M.D.

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