In Memoriam: Lorenz E. Zimmerman, MD (1920-2013), and Anastasia U. Zimmerman (1923-2013)

Mark O. M. Tso, MD, DSc

Lorenz E. Zimmerman, MD, founder of modern ophthalmic pathology and chairman emeritus of the Department of Ophthalmic Pathology of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, died on March 16, 2013, secondary to complications from respiratory infection. Ten days later, his wife of 53 years, Anastasia U. Zimmerman, died of congestive heart failure.

Lorenz Zimmerman graduated from George Washington University in 1945, completed general pathology residency at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and was commissioned as commanding officer of the 8217th Mobile Medical Laboratory in Korea in 1950. He was subsequently assigned to the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in 1952, where he remained for 52 years. Zimmerman received many distinguished awards including the Laureate Recognition Award of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Ernst Jung Prize for Medicine, the Helen Keller Prize for Vision Research, the Donders Medal of the Netherlands, and the Lucien Howe Medal of the American Ophthalmological Society, among others.

In the 1930s and 1940s, ophthalmic pathology was a favored hobby of prominent ophthalmologists, but Zimmerman developed an academic framework for ophthalmic pathology and established it as an important subspecialty of ophthalmology. Zimmerman acquired a deep understanding in the clinical practice of ophthalmology, and through his study of diseased eye tissues and the art of clinicopathological correlative studies, provided answers from a general pathologist's perspective for issues of ophthalmic practice. With sharp observation, disciplined thinking, hard work, logical deduction, and follow-up studies, he developed new classifications of many ophthalmic entities including neoplasms, corneal dystrophies, inflammations, degenerations, congenital abnormalities, and other eye diseases.

Zimmerman was an inspirational and gracious teacher, who attracted the best ophthalmic pathology trainees from all over the world. He taught them the art of clinicopathological correlative studies and spread his teachings through his prominent leadership in the Verhoeff Zimmerman Society and Eastern Ophthalmic Pathology Society, as well as through extensive lecturing tours. His trainees admired and loved their teacher for his honesty, integrity, and loving care, and themselves became prominent ophthalmic pathology teachers all over the world.

Zimmerman and his wife Anastasia were a splendid team, who provided a warm and supportive environment for his trainees and colleagues. He was a devoted family man and is survived by 6 children, 14 grandchildren, and 9 great grandchildren.

David Cogan, MD, of Harvard Medical School called Zimmerman “God’s gift to ophthalmology in the 20th century.” Through his clinical studies, research investigations, and teaching programs, Zimmerman elevated the practice of eye care globally and will be remembered for his education of an entire generation of ophthalmic pathologists.

Author Affiliation: Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland.

Corresponding Author: Mark O. M. Tso, MD, DSc, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Wilmer Eye Institute, 400 N Broadway St, Smith Bldg, Rm 4035, Baltimore, MD 21286 (matso@jhmi.edu).

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None reported.