

University of Groningen

In Memoriam E. Milly Haagedoorn, MD, PhD

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In Memoriam E. Milly Haagedoorn, MD, PhD

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Mentor, Friend and Colleague
(1931–2017)



Dr E. Milly L. Haagedoorn

We are sad to report on the death of E. Milly L. Haagedoorn, MD, PhD (October 9, 2017). She had dedicated much of her professional life as a full-time cancer educator, first at Leiden University, then at the Netherlands Cancer Institute in Amsterdam. Those of us who knew her had the greatest respect for her intellect, passion, work ethic, charm, and diplomacy. As a young educator, I looked forward to the annual meeting and learning from Milly. While she was closer in age and stature with the leaders of the field, she always found time to provide me and my peers with her valued advice. Milly touched the lives of many practitioners and educators and countless patients benefited indirectly from her mentorship. We were truly blessed to have known her! (AMM Editor's note)

At the first and only joint meeting of the American Association for Cancer Education (AACE) and European Association for Cancer Education (EACE) in Washington, D.C., on November 4, 2000, she was the first (and only European) recipient of the Margaret Hay Edwards Achievement Medal, the American Association for Cancer

Education's highest award for outstanding contributions to cancer education.

On that occasion, her good friend and colleague Richard Bakemeier, MD, described her life story in the *Journal of Cancer Education* (1). He related her unique journey from war child, to musician, to medical doctor and ultimately to becoming a passionate cancer educator. In that issue, Milly's last publication on cancer education appeared: *The UICC Cancer Education Project: A Different Approach* (2).

She became a member of AACE in 1979 and had been active in its International Cancer Education Section. In 1987, she was a founding member of the EACE and the first President in the first two years.

Milly earned a PhD degree at the University of Groningen in 1985 with her doctoral thesis "Aspects of Cancer Education for Professionals." Dr Bakemeier was one of the two promoters supporting her candidacy.

In 1987, Milly moved from Amsterdam to Groningen to join the Groningen University Faculty of Medicine. As a member of the Medical Education Committee of the Department of General Surgery, she actively developed an outstanding multidisciplinary cancer curriculum while stimulating the growth of the EACE and the evaluation of cancer education programs throughout Europe.

Her major contribution to cancer education was the publication of an oncology textbook in Dutch which has been translated in English, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, German, and Estonian, educating many young medical students in oncology (3).

At the 12th annual meeting of the EACE in London, UK, in April 1999, I had the privilege to present the first Milly Haagedoorn lecture on Essentials in Cancer Education (4).

I worked with her since 1996 on the development of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Cancer Education and a highly successful International Summer School "Oncology for Medical Students" (5) which started in Groningen in 1995 and since 2000 has been held alternately in Groningen and Vienna. The 22nd edition is planned for July 2018 in Groningen (www.isoms.nl) including student representatives from medical schools from all over the world.

On a personal note, Milly was both a social and private person. She liked to work with others (which was not always easy) and stimulate students, and all young people to help them develop themselves. In her private life, she protected her freedom.

Since her retirement from Groningen, she focused on the joys of playing the violin and piano and reading books, because her other favorite activity (traveling the world) was no longer possible. During her last years, she gradually lost both her physical and mental mobility, leading to a lonely death on the morning of October 9, 2017. We will never forget her.

Jakob de Vries, MD, PhD

University Medical Center Groningen

Millie Haagadoorn remembered by Bob Chamberlain 10-2017

Millie and I met at an annual AACE meeting, about 25 years ago when she was attending with her colleague Wim Bender. We became good friends and Millie asked if she could give my wife and I a tour of her country, if I would agree to attend an EACE meeting there. A few years later, we did this and Millie toured Pam and I in her Volvo for three days to small villages and farms on the polders south of Amsterdam. Millie liked to be “in charge” and she had our route and hotels well planned. It was early December and in one village, we viewed a Saint Nicholas parade, with St. Nick on a white horse, surrounded by little elves in blackface. Millie explained that this centuries-old celebration was unrelated to Christmas and the elves represented the Moors. Somehow, our Christmas traditions morphed into a Santa with a workshop staffed by elves, a sleigh pulled by reindeer, and snowmen. Millie loved to share her wealth of historical knowledge. She said, “I was almost an American.” When she was a girl in the 1930s, her family booked passage from Rotterdam to New York, but they were not allowed to board because she had a cough. Instead, they evaded the German invasion by taking the next departing ship a few days later. It was bound for Indonesia, then a Dutch colony. Soon after arriving there, the Japanese army invaded and she and her parents were imprisoned. Her father, a dentist, was sent to a

camp for men and Millie and her mother lived for several years, as prisoners in a camp for women. When the war ended, Millie said that the Japanese guards disappeared one morning and all of the women and children walked to a train station in a nearby town. There on the platform with hundreds of men was her father. After returning to the Netherlands, Millie had to overcome the deficit of missing school while in Indonesia. Qualifying for medical school must have been a struggle, but I was not surprised that she was successful. When she made decisions, there was no turning back and no obstacles too large. She had strong opinions and always offered to share them with me. I once called her stubborn and she responded that it was a Dutch characteristic. A good example occurred on our trip to the UICC meeting in New Dehli, where we operated a booth to promote membership in the AACE and EACE. A very small, old Indian servant was distributing decorative ferns in pots to each booth. Millie told him that we didn’t order one and did not want one. Nevertheless, the servant placed the plant on our table and held out his hand for a tip. Millie told him no, but I said that a few Rupies was only about 10 cents and reached in my pocket. This gesture was not to her liking and she said that I was a fool. We both laughed. That was the kind of friends we were.

Robert Chamberlain, PhD

Past AACE President

Those of us who had the privilege of knowing and working with Dr. Haagedoorn professionally are aware of her pioneer contributions to cancer education and cancer control in the Netherlands and Europe. I had the pleasure of getting to know her on a personal level when, along with others, we collaborated on the organization of the joint meeting of the American and European Association’s for Cancer Education annual meeting in Washington, D.C. in the year 2000. While all of us who knew her feel the loss of her passing, Milly leaves a lasting legacy in the training programs she championed and the lives and careers of the many students she touched.

Richard E. Gallagher, PhD.

Professor Emeritus

Wayne State University