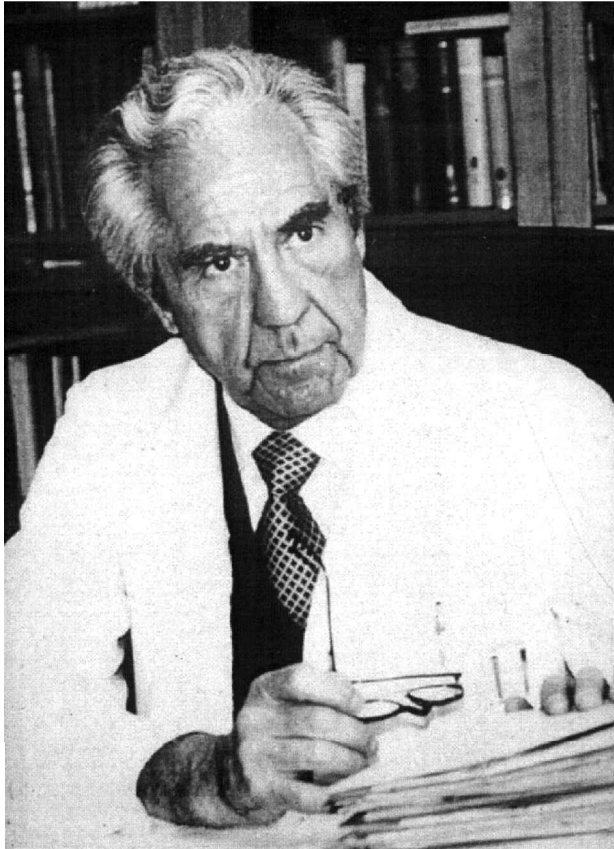


Obituary

Åke Senning (1915 – 2000)



ONE OF THE LEADING PIONEERS OF OPEN heart surgery, Åke Senning, passed away in Zurich on July 21st after a long illness. He was born in 1915 in Raettkvik, Sweden, where his father was medical practitioner. Senning studied medicine in Uppsala and in Stockholm. He trained first in general surgery and neurosurgery, and moved later to thoracic surgery, when he joined the team of Clarence Crafford, one of the fathers of the modern thoracic surgery, in Sabbatsberg Hospital in Stockholm. He was put in charge of research, and developed one of the first workable pump

oxygenators. This was used in 1953 in removal of a left atrial myxoma in a young female, who is incidentally still alive today! Senning followed Crafford to Karolinska Hospital, where he became Professor of Surgery in 1956. This was Senning's most productive period, during which he made some of his most important contributions to cardiac surgery. Of particular significance to those concerned with cardiology in the young was his description of atrial correction for hearts with concordant atrioventricular and discordant ventriculo-arterial connections (complete transposition). Described in 1958, the procedure now bears his name. Also in 1958, he described the first implantation of a totally encapsulated pacemaker for treatment of complete atrioventricular block. He also described electrically induced ventricular fibrillation for prevention of air embolism during open heart surgery, left heart bypass for circulatory assistance, and endarterectomy of coronary arteries for treatment of angina pectoris. In 1961, Senning left Sweden and was elected to the Chair of Surgery at the University of Zurich. He quickly established Zurich as one of the leading cardio-surgical centers in the world. His interest in autologous tissue led to development of the fascia lata aortic valve, an autologous valve that did not need anticoagulation and which functioned well for very extended periods of time. He was a dominant figure not only in the field of cardiac surgery. Thus, in 1964 he established the Swiss programme for renal transplantation, and his interest in hepatic surgery led him to create a cavo-atrial anastomosis for treatment of the Budd Chiari Syndrome.

Åke Senning retired from his university chair in 1985, but remained active in surgery for a number of years. He maintained a life-long and keen interest in cardiothoracic surgery, continuing his regular attendances to the annual meetings of the American Association of Thoracic Surgery and other major meetings.

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