
OBITUARY

**Professor Alfred Michael Thiess, MD, PhD h. c.
(1921-2016)**



On February 3, 2016 Professor Alfred Michael Thiess passed away in Ludwigshafen, Germany, the legendary founder and Honorary President of the International Scientific Association for Occupational and Environmental Health in the Production and Use of Chemicals MEDICHEM.

Professor Thiess was born near Hermannstadt, Romania. He came to Germany to study medicine in Frankfurt and stayed there his entire life. In 1954 he joined BASF where he was head of the Occupational Medical Department from 1963 until his retirement in 1986. During this time he was one of the major forces behind the development of occupational medicine in Germany. He intensified the application of occupational epidemiology in an industrial setting and fostered health promotion not only in the sense of “one-time” campaigns but with a focus on subsequent evaluation of its success. The results of his scientific work were published in more than two hundred articles in national and international occupational medical journals. Besides, he was a teacher at the Mannheim Medical Faculty of the University of Heidelberg and still found the time to actively participate in numerous national and international expert groups. In 1972 he inaugurated MEDICHEM, which also acts as the Scientific Committee on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry of the International Commission for Occupational Health (ICOH). He served as MEDICHEM Chairman from 1972 to 1986, and afterwards as Honorary President he always took a keen and active interest in supporting MEDICHEM’s goals and development.

In recognition of his achievements he received numerous awards and honours, among them the Grand Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. But one award, by far not the most prestigious one, just through its title characterized Professor Thiess so perfectly that it shall be mentioned here: It was the Service above Self

Award issued by the Rotary Club. Why that? Immediately after the fall of the iron curtain, Professor Thiess had started activities directed at helping schools, hospitals and other social institutions in Romania, to overcome the many shortcomings accumulated under the dictatorial regime of the past. It was for this reason that the German Society of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (DGAUM) had to wait for one more year until he found the time to accept the most prestigious award for his lifetime achievements to be issued by this society, the Franz-Kölsch Medal. Coinciding with the intended date for the award ceremony Professor Thiess had already scheduled a truck convoy to Siebenbürgen, Romania. These activities were always more important to him than honours and recognitions directed to himself. In 2002 the city of his ancestors, Urwegen, Romania, bestowed on him honorary citizenship in recognition of his untiring and generous support over many years.

Professor Thiess has lived a long and fruitful life, and he was always aware of and grateful for this. While he received public honours with pride and grace, the prospect of public recognition was never the driver for his desire to influence and help. He was intrinsically motivated, and he was a formidable motivator of others. He was able to combine professional leadership with honest and warm personal interest in his co-workers, thus making it easy for them to adopt and actively pursue his sometimes indeed challenging goals. He has left deep marks not only in the history of German and international Occupational Medicine but also in the hearts of many people who had the privilege to work with him. Our thoughts and best wishes go to his wife, his life and professional companion, Dr Gisela Thiess and their family. We are sad to have lost him, but grateful that we had had him

The connection with Professor Thiess and *Archives of Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology* is timeless because he was more than a colleague to a number of former and current members of the journal’s editorial boards. He will be remembered as an excellent professional and scientist, a passionate and motivating person with an exceptional personality and a true friend to everybody who had the privilege to meet him.

Dr Michael Nasterlack