

NEWS & VIEWS

Clemens Von Pirquet Discovered and defined allergy

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Clemens von Pirquet
An Austrian Scientist and
Pediatrician
(May 12, 1874-February 28, 1929)

Clemens Peter Freiherr von Pirquet (May 12, 1874–February 28, 1929) was an Austrian scientist and pediatrician best known for his contributions to the fields of bacteriology and immunology. Clemens Peter Freiherr von Pirquet was the progeny of a Lower Austrian noble family, the term Freiherr corresponding to English baron. His brother was Guido von Pirquet (1880–1966), a specialist in ballistics and thermodynamics and one of the early pioneers of space exploration.

He was born in Hirschstetten near Vienna. He initially planned to study for the clergy and attended a Jesuit boarding school in Kalksburg before he commenced the study of theology at the University of Innsbruck. However, he soon changed to the study of philosophy at the University of Löwen, but then changed his mind again and studied medicine at the university of Graz. He received his doctor of medicine in 1900. He started practicing at the Children's Clinic in Vienna.

As a newly fledged physician he became an assistant under Theodor Escherich (1857-1911) at the Children's clinic in Vienna. After habilitating for paediatrics in 1908, he had achieved such fame that he

was invited to America to become professor of paediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, a tenure he held for two years. In 1910 he returned to Europe to take over the chair of paediatrics at Breslau. The following year, 1911, he was appointed Escherich's successor in Vienna.

Von Pirquet primarily devoted himself to bacteriology and immunology. In 1906 he noticed that patients who had received injections of horse serum or smallpox vaccine usually had quicker, more severe reactions to second injections. His term for this phenomenon, coined with Béla Schick (1877-1967), designates a conditions from which a drastically increasing proportion of people of the industrialised world suffers: allergy – from the Greek “allos” meaning changed or altered state and “ergon” meaning reaction or reactivity.

While studying the symptoms of cowpox vaccination, he also developed a new theory about the incubation time of infectious diseases and the formation of antibodies. In 1909 he published the results of a series of tuberculin tests of inhabitants of Vienna that showed that 70 percent of the children tested had been infected by tuberculosis by the age of ten, and more than 90 percent at the age of fourteen.

Von Pirquet also made important contributions on infant nutrition, and on provisions in the time immediately after the First World War - a period of great suffering for most Austrians. In 1919 he organised the American

Children's Relief, he extended the paediatric clinic and worked for the education of physicians and nurses. After the establishment of the Austrian Directorate of Public Health he was named Secretary-General, International Union for Youth Welfare to the League of Nations.

On 28th February 1929 Clemens von Pirquet and his wife committed suicide.

Acknowledgement

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