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## Foundation and History of the Danish Society of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery

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### **Development of the specialty**

In 1865 Wilhelm Meyer (1824-1895), "Father of Danish otolaryngology" started to proclaim himself as an otolaryngologist. In 1868 he published his first paper on the adenoids.

During the following decades some of Meyer's assistants and in the course of time other physicians also set up practices as specialists. By the end of the century 14 otolaryngologists practiced in Copenhagen and 9 in the provinces. In 1883 Ernst Schmiegelow (1856-1949) became head of a modest out-patient clinic at the Municipal Hospital in Copenhagen, the first otolaryngology clinic in Denmark. The following year the Copenhagen Polyclinic for the Poor was established, also including an otolaryngology clinic, and in the same year Ernst Schmiegelow, as the first in Denmark, started otolaryngology surgery at St. Joseph's Hospital in Copenhagen.

In 1898 he was appointed head of a newly established out-patient's department at the University hospital in Copenhagen, Frederiks Hospital. At the same time he was appointed reader at the university and soon titular professor. So the otolaryngology specialty was a fact.

### **The need for a forum**

Also other specialties came into existence during the last half of the nineteenth century. The need for a forum arose in which the young specialists could discuss their problems and share their so far sparse experience. This was provided by the Medical Society of Copenhagen (founded 1772). However, with increasing numbers of specialties and specialists, this was not satisfactory in the long run and in 1898, the gynecologists and obstetricians were the first to form their own society. The dermatologists soon followed and in 1899 the otolaryngologists as the third of the specialties founded a society.

### **Founding of the society**

The initiator was Ernst Schmiegelow and his assistant and friend Anders Grønbech (1857-1912). In February 1899 they called for a meeting which was held on the premises of the Medical Society of Copenhagen. It was attended by 11 otolaryngologists and resulted in the foundation of the Society of Otolaryngology. Ernst Schmiegelow was elected president.



*Professor E. Schmiegelow (1856-1949), left, with his assistants L. Mahler, S. Bentzen and S. Engel in front of the Ear clinic at Frederiks Hospital in 1908. Schmiegelow was, with Anders Grønbech, founder of the Danish Society Otolaryngology in 1899*

The first scientific meeting took place soon afterwards on March 11, 1899 in the ear clinic of the University Hospital, Frederik's Hospital. Ten members were present. Schmiegelow read a paper on one of his favorite interests, stenosis of the larynx. Other subjects were melanosarcoma of the larynx and syphilis of the nose and mouth. They were, as the papers of the first decades on the whole, mainly case studies.

### **A hundred year's course**

During the 100 years which have elapsed since the first meeting some 870 meetings have since been held. From the beginning the proceedings of the society have been published annually.

The number of members soon increased. In 1902 there were 19, in 1908 25, in 1912 36 and in 1925 66 members. In 1940 the number was 110, in 1960 171, and in 1980 359. In 1998 the society had 488 members, of which 160 were practicing and 132 in permanent hospital positions.

The first general meeting of the society was held in 1904. On that occasion the second of the two founders, Anders Grønbech, succeeded Ernst Schmiegelow as president. Since then the president's period of service has been two years, however, in 1983, it changed to three years.

The members were and are not only Danes, but also otolaryngologists from especially southern Sweden. Particularly during the first decades of the society the relations to our *Swedish brethren* were very intense. Stockholm was rather far away, Copenhagen only a few hours. 1913-1915 even the treasurer (and vice-president) of the society was a Swede, Frans Wilhelm Torne (1870-1949), head of the university ear clinic in Lund.

During the first years of its existence the society not only took care of the scientific aspects of the specialty, but also of the financial circumstances of its members, especially the relationship to the *sick-benefit associations*. A special committee had been set up to handle it. In 1908 this function, however, was handed over to a *new organization* based on the members of the previously existing committee.

Nearly every year since 1908, except for years of war, the society has invited prominent otolaryngologists from abroad as *guest lecturers*.

### **The Scandinavian conferences**

At the general meeting in 1909 Holger Mygind (1855-1928), head of the ear, nose and throat clinic of the Municipal Hospital in Copenhagen, and at that time president of the society, proposed the holding of a Scandinavian otolaryngology conference. The first took place in Copenhagen in 1911 with Holger Mygind as president. Since then Scandinavian conferences have been held every third year, except for war years, and they have been of the greatest importance for relations among Nordic otolaryngologists. The participating countries are Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and since 1975 also Iceland. The Scandinavian languages are spoken, which has only caused difficulties for some of the Finns. They have therefore proposed a change of the congress' language to English, which also would allow participation from non-Scandinavian countries. A change of language has hitherto been refused because of a desire to preserve the character of a Scandinavian congress. The proceedings of the Scandinavian congresses are, however, published in English as a supplement to the *Acta Otolaryngologica* (Stockholm) and therefore are accessible for non-Scandinavians.



*The domicile of the University Ear-Clinic, Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen 1910-1970.  
Here Otto Metz started impedance audiometry in 1938.*

### **The Wilhelm Meyer lectures**

On the centenary of Wilhelm Meyer's first publication on the adenoids in 1868, the society created the institution of a Wilhelm Meyer Lecture to be held every third year, as a rule, by an invited prominent foreign guest. The event has usually taken place in the venerable amphitheatre of the old Royal Academy of Surgery, erected in 1787. Wilhelm Meyer lecturers are listed in this chapter.

### **Assignments**

The society not only has considerable meeting activity, it also has like other specialty societies, by request of the health authorities, taken upon itself essential assignments, especially in the field of education and recognition of specialists.

So the *theoretical courses* which were introduced in 1973 and are a condition for the certification as specialist, are organized and run by a committee appointed by the society.

Since 1934 another committee participates in the evaluation of applicants for certification.

1934-1990 a committee set up by the society has *evaluated all candidates for appointment as consultants*. Now this evaluation has been taken over by local committees.

*Postgraduate (in-service) training* and courses, which in Denmark are voluntary, have existed since the 1960's due to private initiative. Since 1970 they have been run by the society.





*Holger Mygind (1855-1928), head of the Ear-Clinic of the Municipal Hospital, Copenhagen. Mygind was originator of the first Scandinavian Conference in Otolaryngology, which was held in 1911 in Copenhagen.*

### **Subspecialty societies**

Throughout the course of time the development of otolaryngology has made it increasingly difficult for those involved to master all aspects of the profession. So a need for sub-specialization arose. This resulted in the formation of a number of sub-specialty societies, which still recognize the Otologic Society as their mother society.

The first of these sub-specialty societies to be formed was the Danish Audiologic Society, dating back to 1967. Two years later the Danish Society for Logopedics and Phoniatics followed, in 1978 the Danish Society for Surgery of the Ear, and in 1984 the Danish Society for Nasal Surgery. In 1994 the Danish Society for Head- and Neck Surgery was founded, as one could say rather late. The reason for this was that the field since 1970 had been, and still is, covered by the "interdisciplinary" Danish Society for Head- and Neck Oncology, which has been of the greatest benefit for the cooperation of oncologists (radiotherapists), plastic surgeons, dentists, pathologists and otolaryngologists.

As a consequence of the development which has taken place and in accordance with several other societies and journals, the society in 1991 changed its name by adding "*head and neck surgery*". But it usually still is referred to as the Otologic Society.

On the occasion of the centenary of the society in 1999 it was decided to issue a book on the *History of Danish Otolaryngology*, written by two of the members, K.A. Thomsen and Otto Jepsen.

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