

An Open Letter to Olaf Rudbeck

Dear Olaf:

Modern day lymphologists can appreciate these heart-felt words written by you in 1653 when you were a twenty-three year old medical student:

"Of the many structures difficult to find in anatomical dissections, these vessels, I must confess, are by no means the least. For usually they will not tolerate the finest blunt probe, a sharp knife, a suction tube, or any other instrument whatever. And even though abundantly present, they are often obscured by fat, or are overlooked if not at the moment filled with fluid, when seen they may disappear if not ligated. Thus in elusiveness they rival the lacteals and must be handled with utmost care."

You had plenty of reason to vent your complaints since you had performed about 400 experiments in which you traced the anatomical course of the lymphatics from a number of different organs to the cysterna chyli in half a dozen different species.

Nowadays, we too have reasons to lament. The "elusive" lymphatics, so well described by you, present additional frustrating characteristics because of our preoccupation with cannulation, injection and suture, as well as dissection.

To supplement your fervent words, dear Olaf, please inscribe the following:

"The vessels of the lymphatic system vary greatly in location, number and size. They also vary in consistency — some being more

gossamer than others. They interconnect extensively, especially in the mediastinum. The interconnections and presence of lymph nodes make it difficult to collect pure lymph from a single organ, unless cannulation can be accomplished close to the organ. The valves can be a special source of irritation. Thus a lymphatic that on first glance appears to be suitable for cannulation turns out to be impossible because the valves are close together. The creation of a lymphovenous anastomosis by microsurgical technics demands special instruments and much practice. The unfortunate result of all these distractions is that more experiments are usually needed than planned, causing distress to the investigator and pain to the fiscal administrator."

Your passionate outcry has touched a responsive chord in all of us. We note, however, that in spite of the irksome difficulties you so eloquently describe, you persisted in your research to the extent of 400 experiments, thus bringing honor to your name and a shining example to your colleagues in lymphology.

As our revered sachem Prof. Mayerson* may have said, "If you don't have persistence, you don't have lymphomania."

*H.S. Mayerson, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of Physiology, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; see *Lymphology* 2: 143-150, 1969, page 143.

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