



Sepp Heim (1935—2019)

An obituary by three of his colleagues

Sepp Heim, OMM died on April 23rd 2019 at the age of 84 Years.

Sepp Heim was born into the middle of an existing first generation of the German “orthopedic technician Heim-family”. Representing the second O&P generation created an early personal and intensive connection with orthopedic technology; basically from the time of birth to the day of his passing away. He never saw it differently and he never questioned it.

Even in the younger years of Sepp's life, no day passed being full of information, experiences, events, and important contacts to those involved with orthopedic technology. Later this was true on the level of consulting the German and other global governments and International Aid Organizations, on developing programs for basic and advanced O&P education, continuing education and hands-on training in orthopedics technology. No other individual had the trust and has been given responsibility and the means to create as many O&P schools in countries of need, as Sepp Heim did.

For a phase of his life Sepp Heim was – on behalf of the German government (BMZ/GTZ) - the founding Expert Manager of the Tanzania Training Center for Orthopedic Technologists” TATCOT. Later he was employed as the Director of the German O&P School “Bundesfachschule” (BUFA), by the German Professional O&P Association. In another phase he was elected President of the “International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics” (ISPO) by its global member representatives (2001 – 2004).

During his early involvement at TATCOT he had a vision of appropriately sized and equipped O&P workshops to be established as patient service centers in Tanzania. His vision was far ahead of the economic realities of that

time – but the ISPO publication triggered in 1984 - on modular workshop design is deservedly attached as an important part to the new document for O&P Business Development in Africa, which has been developed in March 2019 at TATCOT and KCMUCo. It has basically the same meaning today as it had when designed 34 years ago.

In addition to the O&P constancy within the family (also the next generation is involved in orthopedic technology) Sepp had many individuals in his life, who accompanied him each on a section of the way, who knew him, who had the same goals by the same means or the same goals pursued with different means

Both genres were welcome to him, the one for the immediate, mutual “rolling up of the shirt sleeves” (Sepp was a “doer”), the other for extensive discussion about the supposedly only factual truth, but always in tolerance of the diversity of opinions and experiences of his communication partners. Sepp Heim both understood himself and his potential opponents, always as the winners of any subject discussion, either he gained approval or he made existing differences very clear. Both results have always been understood as a win-win for both sides! He knew to motivate others and to support them in their own development.

Sepp Heim’s enormous work and the results of developing and establishing O&P Training and Education as well as O&P Services in countries under economic development will always be remembered. His work triggered not only government awareness for the need to install P&O

Services, but also to integrating such services by political decision processes into many a National Health Care system.

Sepp Heim’s companions included, over a different number of years many good and famous colleagues in orthopedic medicine, technology, and education. Among this large number are three humble colleagues with whom he worked, directly and indirectly, very closely and for decades in the international development of O&P training on numerous continents and countries and on international professional policy. Among many others these three were:

Harold Shangali, Wilfried Raab and Wieland Kaphingst.

Here is our specific memory of Sepp Heim:

Sepp was a leader who also wanted to be (quietly) led, an instructor who could also learn, a role model with his own role models, a stimulator who was easy to excite himself, a critic and a recognizer of value created. He was a new sponsor of new ideas, a creative person who was able to develop more effective ideas himself in one month than others in a year.

In short, as a strong leader Sepp was by no means a "simple" or totally "flawless" personality. He would have never claimed that for himself either. On the contrary, his motto was: "He who does nothing does not make any mistakes," and doing nothing was not only alien to him, but inconceivable.

His life's work, O&P education, was infinite in his own imagination and the fruits of his work suggest that he was not entirely wrong. His work has brought movement to where there was a standstill, and his work is continuing steadily with every new generation of young orthopedic technicians on numerous continents.

Sepp was a personality, a man who knew to judge the strength of his opponents correctly, but did not fear them.

In recognizing strength he was also someone who recognized the strengths of his co-workers and as a leader made maximum use of them for the benefit of each project, but someone still, who is considered “Papa Heim” among many of his students on different continents.

We are proud that we not only knew Sepp Heim, but also worked with him day in day out for a fruitful period of our lives.

Wieland Kaphingst

Wilfried Raab,

Harold Shangali