

Passing of our Honorary Member John S. Fordtran (1931 – 2025)

At the annual meeting in Grudlsee in 1995 the Austrian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology conferred Honorary Membership to John S. Fordtran of Dallas, Texas. In the same year Karl-Franzens-University in Graz conferred an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Medicine to him (see picture). On February 23, 2025 John S. Fordtran passed away at his home north of Dallas, Texas. He was 93 years old.



Conferment of Honorary Degree of Doctor of Medicine to Professor John S. Fordtran
Aula of Karl-Franzens-University, Graz, Austria, June 14, 1995

John Satterfield Fordtran was born in 1931 in Stockdale, near San Antonio, Texas where his parents ran a small dairy farm. After graduating from the Texas Military Institute in 1949 he went to Tulane Medical School in New Orleans. Later he worked with the famous gastroenterologist Franz Ingelfinger in Boston, who then was also the editor of the New England Journal of Medicine. There John Fordtran began what would become a storied career as a world-renowned gastrointestinal physiologist. In 1962 he was appointed as the first Chief of Gastroenterology at Southwestern Medical School in Dallas (the only medical school in the world that currently has 4 living Nobel laureates). In 1979 John Fordtran became Chief of Internal Medicine at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, Texas.

Throughout his whole career John Fordtran always had a research laboratory, so he himself could investigate new ideas about gastrointestinal physiology and pathophysiology. His pioneering research on intestinal absorption and secretion provided many insights into fluid and electrolyte movement across bowel mucosa in man and added fundamental advancements in the understanding of gastrointestinal diseases. He developed the triple-lumen-perfusion technique which by using a nonabsorbable marker allowed quantitative assessment of absorption and secretion. So, for instance, he identified the bicarbonate/chloride exchanger in the ileum, an active transport mechanism (some 30 years later this transporter was confirmed by *in-vitro* studies on isolated intestinal membrane vesicles).

Several Austrian gastroenterologists (Bernd Aichbichler, Andreas Eherer, Florentine Fuerst, Heinz Hammer, Christoph Hoegenauer, Christine Kapral and Heimo Wenzl) held research fellowships with him and were his coworkers. Their research has always resulted in numerous excellent publications.

Dr. Fordtran excelled in all he did. He was president of the highly esteemed American Society for Clinical Investigation and many awards, honors and medals were bestowed on him. Among many others the Julius Friedenwald Award of the American Gastroenterological Association. The Sleisinger/Fordtran textbook of gastroenterology (first published in 1973) became one of the leading textbooks in our field. It is now in its 12th edition and is still considered as the gold standard of gastroenterology textbooks by many clinicians.

The Austrian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology was proud to have John Fordtran as its Honorary Member. John Fordtran was a great mentor for generations of physicians and a role model of a physician/scientist.

Guenter J. Krejs