150th death anniversary of DOG founder Albrecht von Graefe

“We should live up to his high standards”

Munich – 2020 marks the 150th death anniversary of the Albrecht von Graefe, founder of the German Society of Ophthalmology (DOG). The DOG will commemorate their founder and call into mind the timeless values for which he stood with numerous activities, including a wreath-laying ceremony at the statue of the renowned ophthalmologist on the Berliner Charité campus, a special congress symposium, a visit to the Albrecht von Graefe Highschool in Berlin Kreuzberg, and a new biography. Albrecht von Graefe, who lived and practiced in Berlin, died of tuberculosis on July 20th, 1870.

Albrecht von Graefe (1828-1870) founded the Deutsche Ophthalmologische Gesellschaft (German Ophthalmological Society) in Heidelberg in 1857. “Von Graefe was a highly prolific researcher and innovative clinician,” says DOG President Professor Dr. med. Hans Hoerauf. Von Graefe was the first to identify diseases including optic disc erosion in glaucoma patients and retinal artery occlusion, which often causes blindness. In addition to the incision into the iris to alleviate glaucoma-related intraocular pressure, he developed procedures for glaucoma surgery still in use well into the 20th century. As a surgeon, von Graefe achieved remarkable results for his patients.

Soon after opening his private practice in Berlin in 1852, his reputation as a clinician and researcher spread, and patients as well as students from around the world sought out his 120-bed clinic. “A discerning diagnostician and a dedicated teacher, von Graefe also cared greatly about social justice and providing a high level of care to underprivileged and wealthy patients alike,” Hoerauf says. In his early career as well as during his tenure as full professor at Charité, his primary focus was the patients' wellbeing, regardless of their social or economic status. “We should live up to his high standards and fight the unfortunate developments brought by the increasingly profit-oriented mindset in healthcare,” Hoerauf emphasizes.

A new biography of von Graefe by Professor Dr. med. Jens Martin Rohrbach, Director of the History of Ophthalmology research unit at Tübingen, also elaborates on the DOG founder’s strong values. “Von Graefe was the representative of a humane, empathic approach to medicine,” Rohrbach says. “He was inspired by the idea that true progress can only be achieved through international collaboration and sound science. This also means that he was always ready to question his own practice in order to find an even better solution.” Rohrbach’s biography of von Graefe will be published by Springer in the summer 2020, in time for the DOG Conference.

The DOG will honor their founder with a number of ceremonies and other activities. On July 20th, 2020, the 150th anniversary of von Graefe’s death, there will be a ceremonious wreath
laying at the statue if the famous ophthalmologist on the Charité campus in Berlin Mitte. DOG representatives will also visit the Albrecht von Graefe Highschool in Berlin Kreuzberg. In 2015, the student body, faculty and parents of the school that offers all school-leaving qualifications including Abitur had voted to name their institute after von Graefe.

“For an ophthalmologist it is a great feeling to have coffee in the school’s Graefe Bistro and find that the students create gym sacks, bags and T-shirts with Graefe logos in their workshop classes,” DOG President Hoerauf says. The students also plan to take part in this year's DOG conference, which will take place at the Estrel Berlin and include an exhibition, an excursion, an art competition and several symposia in honor of von Graefe.

The celebratory symposium will be dedicated to von Graefe’s extraordinary character, his impact on ophthalmology, and the conditions under which the founder of modern ophthalmology practiced medicine in the 19th century. “It was a time when infections played a major part. In the era before antibiotics were discovered, infections posed a much graver danger than today,” Hoerauf says. The celebratory symposium is a joint event hosted by the DOG and the Julius-Hirschberg-Gesellschaft, whose annual conference takes place at the Estrel Berlin on the Saturday of the same weekend. For the development of new treatments and therapeutic approaches, 19th century medicine also relied heavily on case descriptions. The symposium “Kasuistiken und Konzepte – Wie Einzelbeobachtungen in die Augenheilkunde veränderten” (“Cases and Concepts: the Impact of Case Studies on Ophthalmology”) takes a closer look at this topic.

A new website listing all DOG activities related to the von Graefe memorial year will be available in mid-February. The website will also contain detailed information on Albrecht von Graefe – physician, scientist and extraordinary human being. www.von-graefe.dog.org

**DOG: research – science – patient care**

*DOG is the medical science association of ophthalmologists in Germany. More than 7,750 doctors, researchers, and scientists in the field of ophthalmology are members. The key mission of the DOG is to promote ophthalmological research. The organization supports scientific projects and research studies, organizes conferences, and publishes scientific journals. DOG also supports and promotes young scientists and researchers, e.g. by offering stipends. Established 1857 in Heidelberg, DOG is the world’s oldest ophthalmological society and the oldest medical specialists’ association in Germany.*