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Medical Anniversary

FRIEDRICH WEGENER, 7 April 1907

Friedrich Wegener (1907–1990) was born in Varel, Oldenburg, Germany. His father was a doctor and his mother a Swedish gymnastic director. With this athletic background and a fine physique, he became, in 1931, German hammer-throwing champion. He graduated MD (1932) in Kiel with a thesis entitled *Testicular tumours*. He became a pathologist in Kiel, then Breslau, and finally Professor in Lubeck. He described three patients with his syndrome to the German Pathological Society (1936) and during his lifetime saw 12 cases of Wegener's granulomatosis but never used that eponym. He had seven children and 17 grandchildren when he died on 9 July 1990.

Wegener's granulomatosis involves nasopharynx, lungs, eyes and kidneys. It was universally fatal until the advent of corticosteroids, cyclophosphamide, and antibiotics. Wegener lived to see two remarkable advances in his disorder. Firstly, the introduction of a most helpful diagnostic blood test; anti-neutrophil cytoplasmic autoantibodies are identified in serum of patients by immunofluorescence microscopy using alcohol-fixed normal human neutrophils. He also derived considerable joy from the second advance, namely treatment. When he first described the condition in 1936 it was associated with 100% mortality. In the succeeding 50 years, he witnessed the introduction of corticosteroids, cyclophosphamide, and antibiotics, all of which have combined to reduce the mortality to 5–10%. He was delighted that earlier diagnosis by a non-invasive procedure led to much earlier treatment and thus a substantial improvement in prognosis. — *DG James*