

Tribute to Mr. Jan VLAYEN (1944-2025)



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Beyond surgeons and academic leaders, the history and excellence of an orthopaedic department are also built by exceptional allied professionals whose expertise, dedication, and humanity profoundly shape patient care. Among them, Mr. Jan Vlayen occupies a singular and lasting place at the Cliniques universitaires Saint-Luc.

Mr. Jan Vlayen served as Head of the Plaster Room at the Cliniques universitaires Saint-Luc from the very foundation of our institution until his retirement. An iconic and emblematic figure of the plaster room, he devoted his entire professional life to the care of patients, contributing tirelessly to their recovery and comfort. His involvement was so extensive that it was rare to encounter a family in which no member had benefited from his attentive and compassionate care. His radiant kindness and constant smile made the prospect of prolonged plaster immobilisation far less burdensome for countless patients. Many patients came for him as much as for the physician. Nevertheless, even when his practical expertise largely surpassed that of others, he consistently demonstrated profound humility, sharing his advice with tact and discretion so that the physician would always remain in the foreground.

From the very beginning, Mr. Vlayen was a loyal and highly skilled collaborator of the Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgery Department. Alongside Professors André Vincent, Pierre de Nayer and Jean-Jacques Rombouts, he played a pivotal role in the development of plaster immobilisation techniques in Belgium. He actively contributed to the introduction of the Sarmiento method, designed a walking cast shoe, and participated in the development of innovative immobilisation techniques, particularly for thoracobrachial casts.

His commitment extended well beyond the walls of our institution. Mr. Vlayen worked actively towards the professional recognition of plaster technicians and was deeply involved in the structured training of this discipline at the national level. His expertise was also sought internationally, including in the United States, where he contributed to educational programmes and professional training.

Many orthopaedic surgeons benefited from his invaluable advice and owed a significant part of their practical knowledge of plaster immobilisation techniques to his teaching. For numerous caregivers and

patients alike, he remains the image of a professional fully devoted to patient care—so appreciated that his presence was often more vividly remembered, and even requested, than that of the many surgeons involved in the treatment process. Despite this recognition, he always remained remarkably humble, consistently stepping back and placing the patient and the team before himself.

We all share profound gratitude for everything Mr. Jan Vlayen brought to our institution, to our discipline, and above all, to our patients throughout his career.

Our thoughts are with his wife, his daughter, and his grandchildren, to whom the department extends its deepest sympathy.

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