

Dietrich Kraft

1937 - 2026

The members of the Center for Pathophysiology, Infectiology, and Immunology mourn the loss of Prof. Dr. Dietrich Kraft, who unexpectedly passed away on February 28, 2026 at the age of 89. Dietrich Kraft significantly shaped the Institute of Pathophysiology and Allergy Research through his scientific work and his collegial and constructive approach. He was an internationally renowned scientist, an outstanding academic teacher, a thoughtful physician, a wonderful boss, and an exceptional mentor. Beyond his professional expertise, Dietrich Kraft conveyed humanity and an interest in art and culture. He was a great scholar, teacher, and humanist.



Dietrich Kraft was born in Innsbruck, Tyrol, Austria, in 1937 and studied medicine in Vienna and Hamburg. After completing his medical studies at the University of Vienna in 1965, he undertook a one-year residency in internal medicine before working as researcher at the Institute of General and Experimental Pathology at the University of Vienna from 1967 to 1969. From 1969 to 1974, he worked at the University Clinic for Dermatology, where he completed his specialist training in dermatology in 1973. During this time, he developed a deep interest in allergic diseases, leading him to practice at the Allergy Clinic Reumannplatz in Vienna alongside his research and teaching activities at the University of Vienna. He completed a postdoctoral training from 1974-1975 in the world-renowned laboratory of Prof. Robin Coombs in Cambridge. During that time already he published seminal work in allergy research.

In 1976, he returned to the Institute of General and Experimental Pathology and received his habilitation (*Venia legendi*) in 1977. Together with Helmut Rumpold, he described a surface antigen specific for natural killer cells published in "Nature." Still, he always remained committed to allergy research. Together with Michael Breitenbach, Helmut Rumpold, and Otto Scheiner, he developed the ambitious plan to recombinantly produce allergens using molecular biological methods in 1983. To achieve this goal, he founded the company Biomay with Georg Mayrhofer, a pharmacy owner in Linz. Again Dietrich Kraft broke entirely new ground, as the founding of a research-oriented spin-off company was an absolute novelty at the time. His courage and efforts were rewarded by the "cloning" of the major birch pollen allergen Bet v 1 and the cross-reactive Bet v 2 (profilin) allergen, which was published in "Science." This provided the fundament for the "Vienna School of Allergology". Molecular allergology has since become an essential procedure in daily allergy diagnosis, and "recombinant allergy vaccines" have successfully completed clinical trials. Dietrich Kraft was appointed university professor in 1992 and, as head of the Division of Immunopathology, led allergy research in Vienna to international fame. He also intensively studied the work of Clemens von Pirquet, who, besides many other scientific discoveries, was the first to coin the term "allergy" in 1906. Beyond this, Dietrich Kraft was a passionate teacher of medical students and a mentor to numerous researchers. Some of his students remained at the university, while others launched successful careers elsewhere. Dietrich Kraft co-edited and co-authored several textbooks and conference proceedings and organized national and international scientific congresses. From 1998 to 2000, he was Editor-in-Chief of the renowned journal "International

Archives of Allergy and Immunology." As an active member of various scientific societies, such as the Austrian Society for Allergology and Immunology (ÖGAI), the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), the World Allergy Organisation (WAO), and the Collegium Internationale Allergologicum (CIA), he represented Austrian allergy research. In May 1999, Dietrich Kraft was appointed a full member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. During his scientific career he received numerous prestigious national and international awards.

Professor Dietrich Kraft was a visionary who fought for his goals. "Do right and fear no one" ("Recte fac, neminem time") and the "Desiderata" were among his guiding principles. Alongside hard work, he always emphasized fostering team spirit, for example, through legendary Christmas parties and summer outings. His second great passion was art, particularly 20th-century painting. He was an art collector, author and editor of various art books, curated exhibitions, and made inspiring tours through art collections for his staff.

With his diverse knowledge, critical mind, charisma, and enthusiasm for his goals, Dietrich Kraft enriched us all in countless ways. He taught us to think independently, to remain critical, and never to lose our sense of humor.

We are grateful that he guided and supported us on our academic paths. With Dietrich Kraft's passing, we have lost a great mentor and a remarkable role model, and we will miss him dearly.

On behalf of all his students, colleagues and companions who had the privilege of being trained by Dietrich Kraft at the Institute of Pathophysiology and Allergy Research.