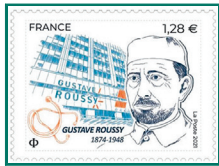




# Gustave Roussy: Swiss-French Neurologist, Pathologist, and Cancer Institute Founder

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**G**ustave Roussy was born on November 24, 1874, in Vevey, Switzerland, the third of 4 children of Emile-Louis Roussy (1848-1920) and Caroline Gabrielle Aguet (1850-1924). His family were Calvinist Protestants, and his Huguenot ancestors had fled from France to Switzerland after religious persecution following the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes. His father was president of the Nestlé condensed milk company from 1905-1920, which had been co-founded by Gustave's grandfather Pierre in 1875. After his father's death, his older brother August became the company president and contributed to the company's growth into a global food conglomerate.

After undergraduate studies in Lausanne, where he was reportedly a poor student except in philosophy, Gustave started medical school at the University of Geneva in 1895, and then moved to the University of Paris in 1897. He developed an interest in neurology during his internship. He published 36 papers as a house officer, mostly case reports.

In 1907 he completed his thesis, which was 387 pages and focused on diseases of the thalamus, and he also qualified as a doctor. He took French citizenship that year in order to practice medicine in France and maintained a lifelong affiliation with the University of Paris. He was appointed Associate Professor of Pathology in 1910, Professor of Pathology in 1925, Dean of the University's medical school in 1933, and University Rector in 1937. In 1940, after the University had closed due to German occupation, he was removed as Rector by the Pétain puppet government (Régime de Vichy) for supporting students who were demonstrating against the Nazis. He was

reinstated as Rector in the summer of 1944 after D-Day and the liberation of France and served in that role until 1947.

Dr Roussy's research focused on neurology, especially diseases of the thalamus and hypothalamus. For example, "Dejerine-Roussy syndrome" is a neurological syndrome characterized by numbness, skin hypersensitivity, and pain because of a lesion of the posterior thalamus, usually caused by a stroke. This thalamic pain syndrome was described by Roussy and his mentor, neurologist Joseph Jules Dejerine (1849-1917), in a 1906 paper and in Dr Roussy's 1907 doctoral thesis.

During the First World War, Roussy was appointed chief of neurology of the 10<sup>th</sup> Army of France and head of a regional neurological center. In that period, he wrote 70 papers on neurological and psychological complications of combat, as well as a book with fellow neurologist Jean Jacques L'hermitte (1877-1959). Among the war veterans to whom Roussy provided medical treatment was the French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894-1961), whose pessimistic award-winning novel *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Journey to the End of the Night) included a doctor character modeled on Roussy.

A rare form of hereditary motor sensory neuropathy — areflexic dysastasia — was called Roussy-Lévy disease, which he described in 1926 with fellow neurologist Gabrielle Charlotte Lévy (1886-1934). In the 1990s, Roussy-Lévy disease was found to be related to Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease and linked to the same *PMP22/CMT1A* gene encoding a component of myelin, and this condition may represent a variant of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. In 1946, Roussy published a 1000-page treatise on

neuroendocrinology, a long-standing research interest.

In 1913, Dr Roussy began work as a clinical neurologist at the then-new Hôpital Paul-Brousse, which was named after a 19<sup>th</sup> century social reformer and located in Villejuif, a southern suburb of Paris. At the time, Villejuif had many poor and working-class residents, and Roussy was particularly moved by the needs of those with cancer.

In 1921, Dr Roussy established the first outpatient service for patients with cancer in Jean L'hermitte's department at Hôpital Paul-Brousse. Partly due to political connections via his father-in-law, in 1925 Roussy obtained funding from the Seine Conseil Général to establish a suburban Paris cancer center at the hospital. This cancer center was adjacent to Hôpital Paul-Brousse until 1980, when it outgrew its premises, and a new free-standing institute was built. In 1947, Roussy was succeeded as cancer institute director by another pathologist, Professor Rene Huguenin. Two years after Dr Roussy's death in 1948, the cancer center was named Institut Gustave-Roussy. In 2013, the name was shorted to simply "Gustave Roussy." Today it is one of the best-known and most-respected cancer hospitals and oncology research centers in Europe.

Dr Roussy received numerous awards, including induction into the Légion d'Honneur following World War II. He was politically active as a left-wing candidate, first standing for election in 1936. In 1947, after his appointment to the French government's

Council of Ministers, he was implicated in a financial scandal involving money transfers between France and Switzerland during the war, which received extensive newspaper coverage as "*L'Affaire Roussy*." Although the case was dismissed by a court in May 1948, and he was later found to have been framed by an associate, Dr Roussy was unable to bear the notoriety and scandal. He attempted suicide by poisoning himself in early 1948, and then succeeded in committing suicide by cutting his wrists in September 1948. He was formally cleared of any wrongdoing in 1949.

He was survived by his widow, Marguerite Henriette Thomson (1884-1967), the daughter of an Algerian-born politician, whom he had married in 1907. She worked diligently after his death to clear his name from the 1947 scandal. They had no children.

Dr Roussy was honored philatelically by France in April 2021 (Scott number pending.)

#### POTENTIAL COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors report no competing interests.

Stamp Vignettes focus on biographical details and accomplishments related to science and medicine, and not individual views and prejudices except where they had a major impact on the subject's life. The authors do not intend to imply any endorsement of such views when discussing a Stamp Vignette on Medical Science.

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