

EDITORIAL

Sir James Black (1924–2010)

This special issue of BJP celebrates the life and work of Sir James Black. The issue also illustrates the great contributions Sir James made, not only to science, but to this journal and to the British Pharmacological Society.

Sir James was elected to membership of the British Pharmacological Society (BPS) in 1961, at the winter meeting hosted by Professor GV Born's Department at the Royal College of Surgeons. He served on the Editorial board of BJP from 1967 to 1973 and as a BPS committee member from 1975 to 1978. He was elected as an honorary member of BPS in 1988 and was awarded that Society's highest distinction, the Wellcome Gold Medal, in 1997. The British Pharmacological Society has also honoured him by running the ongoing annual James Black Symposia Series, held first in Cambridge on 21–25 July 2002.

Jim published 37 full papers and 50 proceedings abstracts in BJP between 1965 and 2007, a tribute to his huge commitment to the Society. He also published one full paper in BJCP.

This issue contains an Appreciation of Sir James from Alan McGregor, friend and physician, first delivered at his funeral in St Columba's Church in Knightsbridge, London, on 29 March 2010. This is followed by tributes sent to the BPS by colleagues who had either worked with him or been touched in some way by his commitment to encourage young scientists.

The Society is also privileged to include Sir James's last manuscript in this special issue. The article titled, "A Life in New Drug Research" was written with the assistance of his wife, Professor Rona MacKie, who has continued to help us with the preparation and publication of this special issue. It is a brief compilation of his memoirs that he wrote for a general audience. Sir James wrote this article after handing us a more technical manuscript about drug discovery. In a style that reflected his life, Jim spent part of the last few weeks of his life revising a

manuscript – reducing his previous technical drug discovery manuscript into a more inclusive, generalist style that could be read by a wider, and younger audience. "Reduce" and "include" seem to be two of his most driving principles. We took the liberty of addressing Sir James here as 'Jim' in that very same spirit. Indeed, on a visit with him at a hospice where he was a patient at the end of last November, we noticed that his locker for personal items had been neatly labeled in stylish print with 'Sir James'. However, 'someone' had taken a pen and crossed out 'Sir James' and simply scribbled 'Jim' above it. More anecdotes about his humility and other qualities are included in the section on personal tributes mentioned above. As an aside, the more technical manuscript will also be published by BJP as the lead article in an upcoming issue on drug discovery.

This is followed by a selection of scientific papers published in BJP that characterize three of the major phases of his career, the discovery of beta-blockers, the discovery of H₂-blockers and his fascination with receptor theory as the bedrock of pharmacology and drug discovery. These are interspersed with short pithy commentaries that he wrote on these and other papers for the 50th Anniversary issue of BJP in 1997 and which bring out his humour as well as his skill with words.

We hope in some way this special issue inspires scientists to follow the ideals that drove Sir James in his scientific pursuits. Most of all, we hope, as Jim would have wanted, that young people gain the confidence to pursue their dreams and not have the 'me too' or herd mentality that Sir James found so antithetical to scientific discovery.

J.C. (Ian) McGrath and Richard A. Bond

Conflicts of interest

JCM and RAB have declared no potential conflicts.