

Obituary

Published online: 25 November 2010
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A celebration of the life and contributions of Merrill J. Egorin

It is with the greatest sadness that the scientific community learned of the death of Merrill J. Egorin on the 7th August 2010. After 5 years, Merrill succumbed to multiple myeloma, and his tragic and untimely death is a massive loss; only compensated for by his huge and lasting contribution to the field of cancer research, and cancer pharmacology in particular. Below are two short obituaries; one from the editorial staff and publishers of Cancer Chemotherapy and Pharmacology, and one from his long-term friend, colleague and CCP Editorial Board member Professor Duncan Jodrell, which give an insight into the attributes, contributions and nature of this remarkable man. We hope that these words will be some small solace to Karen, Melanie, Noah and all Merrill J. Egorin's family at this difficult time.

Professor Merrill J. Egorin—Editor-in-Chief, Cancer Chemotherapy and Pharmacology 1991–2010

Merrill Egorin was appointed to the post of Editor-in-Chief of Cancer Chemotherapy and Pharmacology in January 1991. At the time, he was already established as one of the world's most eminent cancer pharmacologists, and so was a natural choice. Merrill's myriad of contributions to science, documented in his impressive publication record, covered the full spectrum of conventional to targeted therapies, and each drug he worked on was subject to the same highly original and intensely rigorous analysis that were the hallmarks of his approach to cancer research. Although his contributions are innumerable and it is difficult to highlight any one achievement, his work on pharmacologically guided dosing stands out.

In addition to his scientific hallmarks, Merrill's personal attributes were equally outstanding. He welcomed and supported colleagues on all fronts, regardless of status, and ensured that every occasion was as enjoyable as it was productive. His sense of humour was legendary, as illustrated by the annual "thank you" gifts sent out by the North American CCP Editorial Office to those who had been kind enough to review papers, and the highly entertaining annual Editorial Board meetings. Working with Merrill was first and foremost fun; it was something that you just wanted to do!

On a more personal note, as a PhD student, a young Herbie Newell first met Merrill at a US National Cancer Institute Phase I meeting 30 years ago. The drug of the day was carboplatin, and Merrill independently recognised the importance of renal function as a determinant of the pharmacokinetics and hence toxicity of the agent. Subsequently, joining Merrill as an Editor of CCP was an

enormous honour and a great pleasure, and even in the depths of his illness Merrill continued to handle papers for CCP, indeed right up to his death.

Merrill Egorin will be sadly and greatly missed by all those who knew or worked with him. As documented below and elsewhere, Merrill's numerous awards and achievements speak to his standing; however, perhaps the greatest accolade is the affection and respect felt by all of the community for this great man, and the editorial staff and publishers of CCP are amongst his greatest fans.

Herbie Newell and Sandra Cartwright—European Editorial Office, Cancer Chemotherapy and Pharmacology.

Helen Spiker and Florence Wade—North American Editorial Office, Cancer Chemotherapy and Pharmacology.

Laura Walsh—Springer, publishers of Cancer Chemotherapy and Pharmacology.

Professor Merrill J. Egorin—Translational Scientist, Mentor and Friend Extraordinaire

The most recent honour bestowed on Merrill Egorin was the ASCO Cancer Foundation Translational Research Professorship, awarded in 2009. As this is awarded to an outstanding translational researcher who has made a significant contribution and has shared those skills with future translational researchers, it is not difficult to understand why he was the recipient.

Merrill's work in translational cancer research has been regarded highly around the world for many years. His outstanding prominence in the community was also recognised in 2006, when he delivered the Joseph H. Burchenal, Clinical Research Award lecture at the American Association of Cancer Research Annual Meeting.

His contributions to the field of Experimental Therapeutics in Oncology are extensive (over 300 publications are listed on PubMed). However, I believe his publication list fails to represent the full impact that his work has had, as the global recognition of his work has changed the design of translational research studies performed by many other investigators. The ultimate impact of his work has been to improve the management of many legions of patients with cancer. Therefore, he was clearly an outstanding translational researcher who changed the direction of cancer research.

At the time of his death, Merrill was a full professor at the UPMC Cancer Center, co-leading the Center's Molecular Therapeutics and Drug Discovery programme and directing the Center's Clinical Pharmacology Analytical Facility. As part of these roles, he was involved actively in the mentoring of students, graduate trainees and junior faculty.

It was as a young medical oncologist that I had my first encounter with Merrill in 1989, at a European collaborative

group meeting (the EORTC Pharmacology and Molecular Mechanisms (PAMM) Group). His continuing invitations to participate in this group attest to the international regard in which he was held. Indeed, it was at a PAMM Group Meeting in Arcachon in 2005 that the news broke that Merrill had suffered a fracture, the first sign of the illness that was to claim his life. We met again, later in 1989, at the 1st International Workshop on the Pharmacodynamics of Anticancer Agents, which was co-organised by Merrill and Mark Ratain. This ongoing series of workshops has contributed to the incorporation of pharmacodynamic evaluations into all new early phase trials of anticancer agents, attesting further to the impact that Merrill's work has had in the field.

In 1990, I was fortunate enough to become a recipient of the training and mentorship that Merrill has delivered to a series of international trainees and junior faculty who have passed through his laboratories. It is impossible to overstate the quality of the training and mentorship that Merrill provided to his mentees, many of whom now hold senior faculty positions around the world. He made us think in great detail about the drugs we use in the treatment of cancer, improving the way we use them.

Merrill's sense of humour was also unique. I remember his slide comparing himself to the Grateful Dead: "We both do drugs!". We will all remember his "one-liners" and when on ward service he was renowned for producing a "joke of the day" to lighten the mood of both his junior staff and his patients.

Patients were of fundamental importance to Merrill. Despite spending most of his time in the laboratory, he was proud to have trained on the Osler Medical Housestaff Training Program at Johns Hopkins and maintained very high clinical standards. If anyone held the view that laboratory-based translational scientists were not really clinicians, they needed to watch out, as one prominent UK oncologist nearly discovered to his cost!

A rite of passage of visiting workers in his laboratory was to watch "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure"—a challenging experience for this jet-lagged oncology trainee, but it is a memory that will remain with me forever. It was also an example of how Merrill "embraced" his mentees and inducted us into his extended family. I also think Merrill would have appreciated me "borrowing" two lines from Bill S. Preston Esq. and Theodore Logan. He would always want us to "Be excellent to each other" and, despite our sadness and grief, to "Party on dudes".

Merrill's family were the bedrock that allowed him to achieve what he did in science. He leaves behind a devoted wife of 41 years, Karen, and 2 children, Melanie and Noah, who are now young and successful adults in their own right. It is a great sadness that he will not be able to see them and their families develop further, sharing with them

his great enthusiasm for the world, the arts and baseball! Opening Day was a traditional laboratory outing at Memorial Park in Baltimore, to watch the Orioles, although he was also heard cheering for the Pirates in later years.

There is no way to sum up the impact that Merrill has had on the field of Cancer Pharmacology and on the lives of those of us fortunate enough to have worked with him

closely. However, he would have been reassured to know that he has left an immense legacy, that the legacy will continue to bear fruit as a result of his mentoring of the next generation of cancer pharmacologists and that he will never be forgotten.

Duncan Jodrell—CRUK Cambridge Research Institute, University of Cambridge.