

In Memoriam: Dr. Paul A. J. Janssen (1926–2003)

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Photograph by Peter Carmen

On 11 November 2003, Dr. Paul Janssen died suddenly while attending a conference in Rome, Italy. He was a Belgian doctor who became a monumental figure in pharmaceutical research and development. Fifty years ago, Dr. Janssen initiated drug research in Turnhout, Belgium, and then founded the pharmaceutical company Janssen Pharmaceutica in Beerse, Belgium. After Janssen Pharmaceutica joined Johnson & Johnson, the world's most comprehensive health care company, it quickly evolved into a pharmaceutical powerhouse, whose many important products have been used by patients across the globe. Over the years, Dr. Janssen and his colleagues have been responsible for the introduction of approximately 80 drugs into medical therapy.

Dr. Janssen, who was born in Turnhout, studied medicine first at the Catholic University of Louvain, then received his medical degree magna cum laude from Ghent University in 1951. He received a postdoctoral degree in pharmacology in 1956 at Ghent, working part-time as an assistant to Prof. Corneille Heymans (winner of the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1938). Dr. Janssen

also studied at the Institute of Pharmacology of the University of Cologne. He became a researcher in his family's business in 1953 and founded his own laboratory, a forerunner of Janssen Pharmaceutica, in 1956. His success in introducing new products, coupled with his company's rapid growth, led to a multinational partnership with Johnson & Johnson in 1961. Dr. Janssen is an author of more than 850 scientific publications and an inventor on more than 100 patents. He delivered more than 500 scientific presentations all over the world, lecturing in Dutch, English, French, German, or Spanish. He received 22 honorary doctorates, five honorary professorships, and more than 80 medical awards; he was an honorary member of over 30 scientific institutes and organizations.

Dr. Paul Janssen was a brilliant and innovative scientist, an inspiring leader, and a very prolific pharmaceutical researcher. He had a powerful vision of medicine's value in making a better world. Dr. Janssen and co-workers developed breakthrough medicines in numerous therapeutic areas, including anesthesia, pain management, psychiatry, fungal infection, allergy, and gastrointestinal disorders. Up to his death, Dr. Janssen remained closely involved in the quest for new drugs to treat the most severe diseases that threaten human health. During the past 15 years, he became very committed to finding effective antiviral drugs for combating acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).¹ Dr. Janssen has stated that "a good scientist is someone who succeeds in getting the different scientific disciplines to work in harmony with one another". Clearly, he lived by this dictum, and the results from that approach have been abundant. Dr. Janssen refused to accept that there are ultimate limits to science. Indeed, he was characterized by a willingness to consider new developments and to seize promising, albeit risky, opportunities. Dr. Janssen's lifelong work and philosophy provide a tremendous legacy for all of us.²

References

- (1) Dr. Janssen, along with various colleagues, represented a major force in the discovery and evolution of novel non-nucleoside inhibitors of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) reverse transcriptase for the treatment of AIDS. A Perspective manuscript in this issue reflects on the important scientific and clinical progress that they made in this field (De Corte, B. L. *J. Med. Chem.* **2005**, *48*, 1689–1696).
- (2) Readers interested in more details about Dr. Paul Janssen and his drug discovery achievements may consult the following book: Schwartz, H. *Breakthrough: The Discovery of Modern Medicines at Janssen*; Skyline Publishing: Morris Plains, NJ, 1989.

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