

Obituary

Murray E Jarvik, 1923–2008

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Murray Jarvik, a founding member of ACNP, died on 8 May 2008 at his home in Santa Monica, California. Murray was best known for his research on nicotine addiction and as a co-inventor of the nicotine patch to help people stop smoking. When he began that research program in the late 1960s he had already established himself as a pioneering psychopharmacologist by his studies of memory mechanisms and of LSD.

Born in the Bronx to a very poor family that was temporarily on welfare, Murray did his undergraduate work in night school at the City College of New York while holding down a day job as a research assistant in biochemistry at Rockefeller Institute. Drawn to California, he got a master's degree in psychology at UCLA, a PhD at UC Berkeley and an MD at UC San Francisco. This combined training, which was very unusual in the 1940s, helped him go back and forth between laboratory experiments and translational research.

I first met Murray in 1954 when I was an undergraduate at Columbia College. He had returned to New York for a research fellowship at Mount Sinai Hospital and was teaching a course in physiological psychology at Columbia that greatly influenced me. I was already interested in the relationship between brain function and psychological processes and Murray was the first person I met who had given it a lot of thought. One of the topics he covered in his class was the biological basis of memory storage and I wrote a paper for him summarizing what little was known about this at the time. Nine years later this led to our joint research on gene expression during memory formation by studying the effects of actinomycin-D, an RNA synthesis inhibitor, on memory in mice. It also led to a lifelong friendship.

Murray's interest in smoking was stimulated by the difficulty his wife Lissy had in quitting even though she was an otherwise very disciplined person. By 1970 he was convinced that the nicotine in cigarettes was highly addictive, an idea the tobacco industry tried hard to refute. Much of the support for this proposal came from research with monkeys that Murray trained to smoke cigarettes by puffing on them through a mouthpiece, and from studies of the effects of pure nicotine and its antagonists. He began this work in the pharmacology department at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and continued it when he moved to the psychiatry department at UCLA in 1972. It was there in the 1980s that he and Jed Rose developed the nicotine patch. Murray was proud of the patch's usefulness but disappointed that it helped only a fraction of smokers to permanently kick the habit. In 1992 he received the Ochsner Award from the American College of Chest Physicians.

Murray accepted his success with authentic humility. He once told me that his accomplishments had greatly exceeded his expectations. He was especially grateful to have survived a series of life-threatening illnesses including rheumatic heart disease, bulbar polio, and lung cancer (he never smoked).

Murray was a warm and gentle person and a loyal friend. Beneath his quiet demeanor there was an intellectual adventurousness that never waned. He leaves behind his beloved wife of 53 years, Lissy Feingold Jarvik, an esteemed geriatric psychiatrist. He is also survived by his sons Jerry and Larry, and by three grandchildren.

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