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## Editorial

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### A Personal Tribute to Joseph R. Robinson—An Inspiration for All Generations

This issue of *Pharmaceutical Research* is dedicated to the late Professor Joseph R. Robinson, whose untimely passing at the age of 67 on September 5, 2006 has left a big void in the pharmaceutical world. With the help of Darin Furgeson, Assistant Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Wisconsin, we were able to assemble a special issue with manuscripts from Joe's last group of graduate students and with manuscripts from other research groups. This collective work reflects Joe's grand vision of the pharmaceutical sciences. A towering figure known for his visionary leadership, courage, charisma, wit, and selflessness, Joe had inspired generations of pharmaceutical scientists all over the world. In the accompanying obituary, Professor Nicholas Peppas chronicled Joe's scientific triumphs and the impact he had made in society.

It has been a struggle for me to reconcile reality with wishful thinking regarding Joe's death. I was fortunate to be his student, colleague, and friend. Our relationship spanned nearly three decades. As an early member of his academic family and his periodic traveling companion for more than two decades, I had the privilege to know the public side of Joe as an educator and a scientist, as well as his private side as a friend.

To the scientific world, Joe was a brilliant, visionary pharmaceutical giant. Fond of making his own bread at weekends, Joe was also a gifted scientific chef, born to create his own recipes by bringing out the best in the raw materials and then sharing the final entrée with all his adventurous guests. He had always been an avid learner with an inquisitive, analytical mind—traits that served him well in charting his own path in research and defining his research identity.

There were three pillars in Professor Robinson's research: controlled drug delivery, ocular drug delivery, and mucoadhesive-based drug delivery. He achieved success in each area through careful planning and good instincts. Thus, when he was a graduate student of Professor Takeru Higuchi in the mid 1960's, Joe already saw a bright future in rational design of controlled drug delivery systems and, on his own, took on an additional project on modeling and simulation of drug release with Professor Stuart P. Eriksen, a contemporary of Professor Higuchi. When Joe was ready to launch his independent research career in the late 1960's and early 1970's, he had the courage of venturing into a biological area – ocular drug delivery – in an academic unit that took pride in chemistry as its signature strength. Much of the knowledge in ocular drug delivery today can be attributed to Joe's work and that of his academic descendants. Joe succeeded in establishing ocular drug delivery as a credible research area because he saw the value of applying sound physical chemistry principles to solving biological problems. His fascination with mucin in tears led him to launch a third research area in mucoadhesives in the 1980's. I

still remembered the conversation Joe and I had on this subject when I walked him back to his hotel after dinner on his visit to a pharmaceutical company in Southern California. (That was a long walk.)

The above snapshot of Joe's distinguished scientific career is not only an illustration of how he launched and sustained his research career for almost four decades, but is also a reflection of his generosity in sharing ideas, his conviction in embracing other disciplines, and his superb communication skills in inspiring others to join the crusade. Years before interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research were touted as tomorrow's research norm and long before Thomas Friedman declared "The World is Flat", Joe already recognized the importance of both. Joe was a vocal advocate of hosting and attending scientific conferences overseas that brought in opinions from different scientific fields. He was also a strong proponent of nominating international scientists, especially those from related scientific areas, for research achievement awards in pharmaceutical sciences.

One of Joe's greatest gifts was his ability to instantly connect with people from all walks of life: students, scientists, corporate executives, investors and all levels of people. As an anecdote, even though my mother could not communicate with Joe in English on her visit with me while I was Joe's graduate student, she did not feel being left out in the conversations over dinner at Joe's home. Joe cared about what you said, and tried to offer his best insight. He was able to touch everyone's heart with his sincerity.

Joe measured his accomplishments not simply by number of awards, publications, books, or presentations, but by the success of his own children, grandchildren, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, colleagues, and undergraduate students. In addition to expanding the intellect of all of us, Joe also emphasized the importance of developing our character. He prepared us to be at ease with diverse cultures and to be able to bridge cultures and contribute to dialog on global issues. He chose to be our advocate, when he easily could have dominated center stage. He provided a giant shoulder for us to stand on. In my view, Joe was a true Olympian. He trained to be his very best in order to compete with the very best for a gold medal. He understood he could do so effectively probably two or three times. After that, he was content to contribute by sharing his experience with the next generation of aspiring medalists. To Joe, the success of the community must come first. He pointed the way to immortalize success.

Joe had a profound, enduring influence on me as a person and a scientist. He not only prepared me well for the real world by providing me with a breadth of experience, but he also discretely opened doors for me when I launched my own career. Joe brought me into the circle of accomplished scientists. He nominated me for awards, consultancies, and speaking engagements. To him, the

student–mentor relationship is life-long. I consulted with him often, particularly on important decision matters; he was a trustful friend and an eternal mentor. In his characteristic thoughtful way, Joe was always supportive with insightful analysis of the pros and cons.

Joe leaves us with a legacy of integrity, dignity, kindness, and compassion. He kept his sense of humor no matter how adverse his physical condition was, and he lived that spirit to the very end. It is a privilege to be part of his life. I am eternally grateful to Joe

for lending me his wisdom, optimism, self-confidence, and extraordinary inner strength.

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