Obituary

John Leslie Turk, MD, DSc, FRCP, FRCS, FRCPath (1930–2006)

The world of immunology lost a stalwart when John Leslie Turk passed away on 4th June 2006. John Turk was a doctor who took special interest in dermatology and went on to be a pioneer in delayed type hypersensitivity (DTH). He built a strong group of immunologists who are spread over both the developed and the developing countries. He combined clinical and experimental tools to not only understand the basic tenets of cellular immunology but also to apply the findings to the understanding of diseases as well as the action of drugs that affected the immune response. Thus his work impacted many fields and influenced doctors, basic scientists and pharmaceuticals. It is not possible to describe all the scientific interests of John but a few stands out prominently in my mind.

In the ’70s he, along with Darien Parker and Stephen Katz, drew attention to the presence as well as the role of basophils in Jones Mote reaction. He pursued the basis of this reaction with a long chain of students and post doctoral scientists to show that it differed from the classical delayed type hypersensitivity both in kinetics and in regulatory aspects. He was adept at using the newer drugs to understand their effects on the immune system and thereby dissect some of the steps involved in the immune response. It was the beginning of cytokine era and characterisation of the cytokines was mainly by functional assays. He showed that some anticancer drugs such as cyclophosphamide caused immunosuppression by inhibiting interleukin 2 whereas, others such as adriomycin and bleomycin though cytotoxic, increased interleukin 2 release from stimulated T cells. Macrophage inhibiting factor was another cytokine that was investigated for its role on activation of macrophages. He showed the importance of inhibition of tumour necrosis factor or blocking its receptor for treatment of multiple sclerosis.

Delayed type hypersensitivity and contact sensitivity was used in understanding the basis of some dermatological diseases and the clinical spectrum seen in leprosy. Along with Michael Waters and RJW Rees he reported correlated skin tests with the clinical type of patients. This seminal paper along with the newly discovered mouse model for leprosy enthused scientists to investigate the ancient and stigmatized leprosy using the modern tools of immunology. He took the experimental findings in leprosy to another level by persuading DD Palande to use muscle grafts to improve the nerve function in leprosy patients. With such autologous grafts, many patients showed recordable improvement in sensation, vibration, joint sense and sweating. His laboratory became a vibrant training place for scientists from the developing countries. Experimental models and the emerging cellular/T cell immunology made possible the investigation of human diseases. The then young scientists who trained with him went on to develop strong departments to address problems of importance in their own countries. In my view the contribution of John Turk in disseminating knowledge and thereby empowering the scientists of the less endowed
John Turk was born on October 2, 1930 in Farnborough, Hampshire where his father was a solicitor. He specialized in classics from Malvern and went to Guy's Hospital to read Medicine qualifying in 1953 with Honors and 2 gold medals. He met his future wife Terry while doing house jobs in Lewisham. He did his National Service in Egypt and Cyprus. Subsequently he was Senior lecturer of the Institute of Tropical Medicine and worked with John Humphrey at National Institute for Medical Research in Mill Hill. He was appointed as Reader at the Institute of Dermatology and moved to the Institute of Basic Sciences in the Royal College of Surgeons in the seventies as Sir William Collins Professor of Pathology.

John was devoted to his family and the various students and young scientists that he trained. He looked after the latter almost like a family and visited them in their countries. John could be temperamental at times in the laboratory which would confuse some of the newcomers. But he was also very soft at heart and could be ‘persuaded’ after the storm blew over. I recall his concern about students from the tropics who walked in with open sandals. They were first made to get some warm clothes and shoes before they had even introduced themselves. His overseas colleagues found him to be a delightful companion who could more often than not tell them more about their own country’s history and artifacts. I personally cherish the prints of Delhi as seen during the Raj days. He also had a wonderful collection of paintings on mica depicting the Indians of that time with picturesque costumes and jewellery, evidently commissioned by the English ladies. He and his wife Terry had deep connections with India both from the view point of science as well as from a personal angle. Terry in particular kept an eye on his health as well as the health of his students. His son Jeremy did a project on the mental health on leprosy patients and is now a Professor in Psychiatry at
St George’s. His other son Simon is a certified accountant. John Turk developed diabetes during his productive years. This led later to small vessel complications and peripheral neuropathy which made him fragile. During these times he enjoyed the company of his 3 grand children, his thatched cottage in Suffolk and the various antiques that Terry and he collected in their life time. He died on 4th June 2006 of renal complications.

Indira Nath

Professor J.L. Turk MD, DSc MB, BS (Hons), FRCP, FRCPath, FRCS

Emeritus Professor of Pathology, Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons of England (born 2nd October 1930; qualified at Guy’s Hospital), died from renal failure and small vessel cerebral disease secondary to chronic hypertension and diabetes on 4th June 2006.

John Turk was born in Farnborough, Hampshire, where his father worked as a solicitor. He grew up there with his sister Carole, with whom he remained extremely close throughout his life. Having specialised in classics at Malvern College he decided to pursue a career in medicine, qualifying from Guy’s Hospital Medical School with honours and two gold medals before doing junior medical jobs at Lewisham where he met his wife to be Terry. National service requirements dictated that he had to serve in the Royal Army Medical Corp in Egypt and subsequently Cyprus where he developed expertise in morbid anatomy and pathology, reaching the rank of Captain.

Following his return to England John was appointed Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and worked at the Mill Hill MRC research unit, later taking the post of Reader in Immunology at the Institute of Dermatology, University of London. He was one of the pioneering group of clinical and experimental immunologists who founded the British Society for Immunology and who forged multinational links, often with colleagues from deprived and developing nations, building on the early works of Medawar and Humphreys to ensure that Clinical Immunology became the established international discipline that it is today. As a result he was appointed Sir William Collins Professor of Pathology at the Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons, London. John authored two classic textbooks comprising the first definitive publication on Delayed Hypersensitivity and Immunology in Clinical Medicine, a highly popular introduction to the relevance of immunological theory to general medical and surgical practice. This book was translated in to a number of different languages including Bulgarian and Japanese. In addition, he co-edited the Royal Society of Medicine edition of the collected case books of John Hunter and was curator of the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons. He authored an enormous number of high quality peer-reviewed publications and was editor of the journals Clinical & Experimental Immunology and Leprosy Review, President of the British Society for Immunology, President of the Royal Society of Medicine Immunology section, and a recognised international authority on leprosy, on which he was advisor to the World Health Organisation. He was a Fellow of no less than three royal colleges; physicians, surgeons and pathologists. If there were a Royal College of Antique Collectors he would certainly have been a Fellow of that one as well.

In addition to the above he was a devoted family man with an extremely broad and liberal view of how society should be. This led to his travelling extensively and maintaining

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knowledge of a number of ancient and modern languages, as well as working with people of many races and religions. He hosted and supported numerous visiting academics and clinicians from throughout the world, particularly those from developing countries, in order to ensure that clinical and technological advances were enjoyed by the many worldwide and not just by the few in Western Europe and North America. He was also an active member of the Labour Party, albeit leaving it through disillusionment with its direction long before the rest of us did, and was active within the CND. He had a passion for culture and the arts, in particular literature, classical music, judaica and most of all antiquities which he collected avidly, displaying them proudly and informatively in his home in London as well as in his rural retreat in Suffolk.

He doted on his wife Terry, a general practitioner, always joking apologetically to conference organisers that he would have to leave as soon as possible to return home to her cooking! He also loved his sons and his later years were brightened indescribably by the presence of his three grandchildren who helped to bring out the warmer side of him and to compensate for his declining health, the result of decades of chronic illness.

John always maintained the highest standards personally, socially and professionally and believed strongly in hard work. He led from the front and expected others to keep up with him. He had a passion for and commitment to excellence.

He is survived by his wife Terry, retired General Practitioner, and sons Simon, Certified Accountant, and Jeremy, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, as well as his three grandchildren.

**Dr. Jeremy Turk**

John Turk emerged as one of the bright boys of modern immunology from the John Humphrey Laboratory at the National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill, London in the late 1950s. T cells and B cells had just been identified and a new understanding of the genesis and potential of immune complexes opened up a new world of research and the opportunity to apply this research to human disease. John went from Mill Hill, where he developed his interest in the role of immunological mechanisms in inflammation, to the Institute of Dermatology, whose laboratories were at that time in the gloomy backstreets of Hackney. Here he developed a team that started to tackle theoretical and applied aspects of skin diseases. Michael Waters who was working at Sungei Buloh, the leprosarium outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at that time, stimulated his interest in leprosy. Michael was struggling with large numbers of cases of erythema nodosum leprosum and wondered whether they might be associated with immune complex formation. John put a young Nigerian immunologist Simon Wemambu, who had been displaced from his country by the Biafran war, to work on this hypothesis. Simon’s results, published in *The Lancet* in November 1969 were seminal. This launched Simon into a career as an immunologist in Nigeria, and brought John firmly into the field of leprosy and other infectious diseases, including syphilis, meningitis, relapsing fever, and leishmaniasis. Many young physicians and immunologists were trained in his laboratory on their way to great careers, including G. Levene, D Wright, CL Moran, E Pick, L Pollack, D Parker, LW Poulter, J Curtis and JJ Cream; and one of us (ADM Bryceson) owes him a great debt too. John’s work in leprosy continued in collaboration with Michael Waters, Jill Curtis, Marion Ridley, Tom Rea, RB Narayanan, Chris Moran and co-workers in India into the 1990s.
In 1988, as well as his many other interests, John took over from Dr. Colin McDougall as Editor of *Leprosy Review* and for 8 years made the journal his own. John was an immensely hard working and dedicated man, keen to get to the bottom of the problem in hand, and always enthusiastic about his research and supportive of his young fellow workers. He was very likeable on his good days, when his huge sense of humour prevailed, and very temperamental on his bad days when he might throw himself around the laboratory or cringe in a corner out of frustration or despair. Life with John was always stimulating and never dull. His wife Terry, a north London general practitioner, nursed him devotedly through his long terminal illness. He is survived by Terry, their two sons and three grandchildren.

Professor Anthony Bryceson

Professor John Turk, one of the guiding lights in LEPRA’s medical work, died on 4th June 2006 aged 75. He joined LEPRA’s Medical Advisory Board pre-1975, becoming Vice-Chairman under the late Dr. R.J.W. Rees in 1985, and took the Chair himself in 1988 – a post he held until indifferent health forced him to stand down in 1993. Despite this, he remained a member of the board for some years after that, and maintained a keen interest in LEPRA’s work.

Others are far more qualified to describe his medical achievements, and I will not presume to pass comment on them. My association with him began when I was Secretary to LEPRA’s Medical Advisory Board in the 1980s. Our relationship became even closer when he was appointed Editor of *Leprosy Review* in 1988, and I was the Editorial Assistant, whose job it was to send manuscripts out to referees for independent peer review. In those pre-email days the process of choosing referees for manuscripts was varied: either I would take manuscripts up to the Royal College of Surgeons for John to peruse, or we would have a ‘telephone conference’ where I would read out the title of a paper and John would suggest suitable candidates to review it. This twice weekly telephone call was the source of great amusement to many of my colleagues as I struggled to pronounce medical terms that were totally alien to me at the time. John, however, would anticipate the word and gallantly put me out of my misery, but at times both of us (and I might say half of my office) would be helpless with laughter. Once he began spending his weekends at Monks Eleigh the pattern changed again, and Friday afternoons were set aside for his visit to the office to go through the papers.

But it wasn’t all work. Once the business of the Review had been dealt with he would turn to me and say “Right, enough of that, how are you?” He took a keen interest in me as a person outside the work environment, and was very supportive when I was studying as a mature student for my Degree, following my progress with great interest suggesting (and often lending) reading materials that he felt might help me. He also shared his love of the fine arts with me, and discussed various talks and exhibitions he had attended, and I always looked forward to his visits. Although he stepped down as Editor in 1996, we still kept in contact.

In the eight years of his Editorship, John guided the Journal through some difficult periods while maintaining its position as one of the major English language leprosy journals. *Leprosy Review* was very fortunate to have had him as Editor, and I was very fortunate to have known him as a friend.

Irene Allen

Assistant Editor, *Leprosy Review*