

In memoriam

Wylie Walker Vale, Jr.



Wylie Walker Vale, Jr. was born in Houston, Texas, on July 3, 1941. While still in high school, he met and fell in love with his wife Betty to whom he was married for over 40 years. Wylie earned his bachelor's degree in Biology from Rice University in 1964

and his Ph.D. in physiology and Biochemistry from Baylor College of Medicine in 1969. In 1970, after their marriage, he and Betty moved to La Jolla where he began his illustrious scientific career at the Salk Institute in the laboratory of Nobel Laureate Roger Guillemin. In 1978, Wylie set up his independent laboratory at Salk where he continued his groundbreaking work on endocrine peptides. Wylie and Betty enjoyed a good life together raising their two daughters, Elizabeth and Susannah, thoroughly contented in their marriage. On January 12, 2012, Wylie passed away peacefully at the age of 70 in their home in Hana on the beautiful island of Maui, Hawaii, the house being located at the edge of the rainforest, a small part of which he and Betty were remodeling, consistent with their love for raw nature. It is appropriate that Wylie's last resting place should be in this truly peaceful location, his own piece of paradise on earth, as it were, with his wife and lifelong friends close at hand.

During his distinguished scientific career, Wylie discovered a number of hormones and growth factors that provide a molecular link between the central nervous, endocrine and immune systems. In 1981, Wylie and his team identified corticotropin releasing factor (CRF), the primary regulator of an organism's endocrine response to stress. The discovery of this hormone, which would later be recognized

as a bona-fide neurotransmitter in the central nervous system having implications in depression and anxiety-related disorders, effectively launched the field of neuropeptides as we know it today. A few years later, Wylie extended this seminal discovery with his discovery of growth hormone releasing factor as well as three additional peptides within the CRF family, the urocortins, which are important modulators of appetite, metabolism, growth, reproduction, immunity, and cardiac function. The impact of Wylie's work and can best be exemplified by the number of ongoing clinical trials based on his discoveries. Virtually every major pharmaceutical company has developed specific CRF antagonists for the potential treatment of mood disorders, substance abuse and other stress-related diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome. Clinical trials researching molecules for post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol abuse are currently progressing, while the peptide urocortin 2 is also at present in clinical trials for the treatment of acute decompensated heart failure.

Wylie was Co-Founder of two biotechnology companies. The first, Neurocrine Biosciences Inc., founded in 1992, is a public company located in San Diego whose establishment was based largely on his work with the CRF system. The second company, Acceleron Pharma, is a privately held company founded in 2004 and based in Cambridge, MA. Acceleron are developing protein therapeutics targeting the transforming growth factor beta (TGF- β) superfamily of proteins. Wylie and his colleagues were the first to characterize activin-A, a member of the TGF- β /BMP family of growth factors, as well as activin receptor type II which was the first characterized signaling receptor for this family. Wylie was on the Board of Directors for both companies.

Wylie, a highly respected leader in the scientific community, accomplished much in his professional and scientific career, not the least of which being his

election to the National Academy of Sciences (USA) in 1992. In addition to his election to the National Academy, he was elected as a member of several prestigious organizations, including the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Institute of Medicine. He served as a past president of the Endocrine Society as well as of the International Society of Endocrinology. Wylie also received a number of awards, among which the Edwin B. Astwood Lectureship Award and the Fred Conrad Koch Award from the Endocrine Society, the Clinical Lectureship Award (British Royal Soc. Med.), the 4th Yrjö Reenpää Lecture Award from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the H.B. van Dyke Award, the Foundation IPSEN Prize in Endocrine Communication, the Henry Dale Medal presented by the British Society for Endocrinology and the Rolf Luft Award from the Karolinska Institute. In addition, Wylie received Distinguished Alumnus Awards from Rice University in 2000 and from St. John's School in 1995.

From 1980 to the present, Wylie was a Professor and Head of the Clayton Foundation Laboratories for Peptide Biology at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies and, as of 2003, the Helen McLoraine Professor in Molecular Neurobiology. He was also an Adjunct Professor at the University of California at San Diego. During his tenure at the Salk Institute, he served as Chair of the Academic Council and as a member of the Board of Trustees. A visionary and world-renowned expert in endocrinology and basic sciences, Wylie served on a number of advisory and program committees for key institutions, including the Endocrinology Research Program of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease at the National Institutes of Health, the Laurentian Hormone Conference, Searle Scholars Program, Society for Neuroscience, Massachusetts General Hospital and the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine Contraceptive Research and

Development. In addition to his activities outside the Salk Institute, Wylie trained and mentored many young scientists during his career. He thus leaves behind a tremendous legacy.

Wylie was a longstanding friend of the Hellenic Endocrine Society. He felt at home in Greece and tremendously enjoyed the company of his Greek friends and collaborators, who always welcomed him enthusiastically, as well as of a large number of admirers. His lectures were always highly appreciated, never failing to utterly engross his audiences, and most particularly the young researchers. The 20th year of the CRF Conference was hosted in Athens, Greece, in 2002. Wylie held a central role in this meeting, surrounded by numerous friends and colleagues who had assembled from round the world. The Hellenic Endocrine Society plans to organize this year the "30 years of CRF" Conference, honoring Wylie.

A pioneer in his professional life, Wylie had a quite unique, innate ability to intertwine scientific discourse with the recounting of day-to-day humorous life events, leaving his interlocutors completely disarmed and struggling to keep up. Thanks to his high spirits, his biting wit and perpetual humor, his total lack of pretense and, especially, his all-embracing humanity, he could relate to anyone and show genuine interest in whatever they had to say. We have lost a remarkable human being, but he has left us both a brilliant scientific path and a philosophy of life to follow: that is, to not to get too caught up in our own trivialities, to enjoy the moments that we share with each other and, most importantly, to take care of family, both immediate and extended. He will be particularly greatly missed by all who had the privilege of knowing this gentle soul.

George P. Chrousos,
Achille Gravanis and
Andrew (Andy) N. Margioris