

In memoriam

Dr. Samarthji Lal

It is with great sadness that the CCNP membership learned that Dr. Samarthji Lal passed away on Nov. 1, 2009. The CCNP extends their condolences to his wife, Maureen Kiely, his son, Sikander (Alex) Lal, and other family members.

Dr. Lal, or Sam as everyone called him, was born in London, England. His early education was in both England and India. His medical education was at Guy's Hospital Medical School, University of London, United Kingdom, where he graduated in 1962. He then did an internship in London, Ontario, and residency training at the Connecticut Valley Hospital, Connecticut, after which he returned to Montréal. He continued his residency at Queen Mary Veterans' Hospital and obtained a diploma in Psychiatry from McGill University. Sam's great intellectual curiosity led him to apply for a 4-year fellowship from the Medical Research Council of Canada, which he received in 1967. He spent those 4 years in the laboratory of one of the pioneers of neurochemistry, Dr. Theodore Sourkes, in the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University. This period was productive both scientifically and socially, as he married one of Dr. Sourkes' graduate students, Maureen Kiely, who was his partner for nearly 4 decades.

Sam and Maureen remained in Montréal, and Sam practised full time as a psychiatrist at Douglas Hospital and Montreal General Hospital, seeing patients until shortly before his death. Given his heavy clinical load, it is remarkable that he made important contributions to all areas of academic life. In 1980, he set up Canada's first brain bank at the Douglas Hospital Research Institute. He was a cofounder, with Dr. N.P.V. Nair, of the Douglas Mental Health University Institute Research Centre in 1979. He played a pivotal role in obtaining funds from the EJLB Foundation to set up the McGill Centre



for Research on Schizophrenia, and from the Boeckh Family Foundation to establish the Graham Boeckh Chair in Schizophrenia at McGill.

Even with a heavy clinical and administrative load, Sam authored more than 200 peer-reviewed publications. In the early 1970s, he demonstrated that apomorphine stimulated the release of growth hormone in humans via its action on dopamine D₂ receptors. Characteristically, he was one of the first participants in this study and experienced first-hand the need to use subemetic doses of apomorphine. Subsequently, he did a similar study with clonidine, an α_2 adrenergic agonist. The papers reporting these studies demonstrated

how it was possible to determine the sensitivity of D₂ and α_2 receptors in humans; these were among his most cited publications. Sam was among those who studied some of the numerous factors that can influence the sensitivity of D₂ receptors in humans. A chance finding from these studies was the ability of apomorphine to cause penile erections. This eventually resulted in apomorphine being the first centrally acting agent to be approved in various countries for the treatment of erectile dysfunction. Sam's research ranged widely, encompassing various aspects of psychopharmacology and alterations in neurotransmitter and peptide function in psychiatric patients.

Sam received many honours, including Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and the Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Distinguished Scientist Award for Schizophrenia Research. He was one of a very small and distinguished group to receive both the Heinz Lehmann Award (1986) and the Innovations in Neuropsychopharmacology Award (2002) from the CCNP.

Sam Lal was a lifelong member and enthusiastic supporter of the CCNP. He will be missed.

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