

SUNY Downstate

Tribute Alfred Stracher, PhD.



I join together with friends, colleagues and coworkers at SUNY/Downstate to mourn the loss of Distinguished University Professor, Alfred Stracher a pioneer in the study of contractile proteins in biological processes, who died on May 8 at the age of 82. The cause was complications from leukemia.

I also celebrate with all who mourn his qualities which were demonstrated in the every day life of my friend, mentor and colleague, who we all called Al. He was a special, good, and caring person dedicated to his family, friends, profession and family tradition and demonstrated by his kindness, gentleness, and warmth.

All of us have been fortunate to have witnessed and benefited from his demonstration at home and in the workplace the qualities of a humanity which combined professional and personal integrity with an achievement of excellence in teaching and performance in his profession, extension of a hand of friendship, a willingness to listen and share his vision of advancement of learning and experience with all who are dedicated to the advancement of science to make a significant contribution to society.

The list of professional achievements include Distinguished University Professor since 1997. He was at SUNY Downstate Medical Center since 1959. He was Chairman of the Biochemistry Department since his appointment to that position in 1972. Prior to that, he was appointed Professor (1968-1997) and Acting Chairman (1970-1972) of the Biochemistry Department. From 1982 to 1988, Dr. Stracher served as Dean for Research and Development. His was the longest in-service Chairman of Biochemistry of any medical school in the U.S.A. He pioneered research on contractile proteins in non-muscle cells; Co-discoverer of light chains of myosin, among the first to suggest using protease inhibitors as potential therapeutic agents in treating muscular dystrophy and other neuromuscular and neurodegenerative diseases. Together with his friend and colleague Leo Kesner, PhD., Chemistry they identified a technology focusing on the protease calpain and its translation for drug development targeting neurodegeneration, the synthesis of a new drug called Neurodur, and the formulation of the ProTor Pharma corporation, of which Al became President. The vision of both Al and Leo for neurodegeneration and neuroprotection extended beyond their initial investigations to include that of the auditory and central nervous system. An invitation was extended to me to participate. I was privileged to contribute to the development of the additional new drug called Gabadur.

Dr. Stracher received his Bachelor of Science (Chemistry) from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1952, and his M.A. (1954) and Ph.D. (1956) in Chemistry from Columbia University, where he was a teaching assistant and Predoctoral Fellow of the Nutrition Foundation. He then became a National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis Postdoctoral Fellow at the Rockefeller Institute (1956-1958) and Carlsberg Laboratory (1958-59).

In 1998, Dr. Stracher became an Honorary Alumnus of SUNY Downstate, capping a long list of honors, including the Ailanthus Award in 1998. He was a Commonwealth Fund Fellow Visiting Professor in Biophysics at Kings College, London University in 1967, and a Guggenheim Fellow Visiting Professor of Zoology at Oxford University in 1974. From 1981 to 1989, he was a member of the Patent Policy Board of the State University of New York, and from 1984 to 1985. He has been a member of the Drug Task Force of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and has twice served for a total of 8 years as member of the Neurological Disorders Study Section (NSP-B) of NIH from 1981-1989. He was appointed by the Director of NINDS to serve on the prestigious Jacob Javits Neuroscience

Awards Committee (1984-1985). He has been elected to honorary membership in AOA and awarded an MD from the Downstate Medical Center (1998).

Dr. Stracher was a pioneer in the chemistry of muscle proteins, identification and characterization of contractile and cytoskeletal proteins in muscle and non-muscle systems and most recently in the potential of protease inhibitors as therapeutic agents in neuromuscular and neurodegenerative diseases. For neuromuscular degeneration he focused on the development of new therapeutic agents to treat Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy which is now in clinical trial. In addition he has been a leader in the field of Drug Delivery, founding editor in chief of the Journal of Drug Delivery. He developed new drugs for targeting to the CNS for treatment of a number of neurodegenerative diseases including Multiple Sclerosis, spinal cord injury, Alzheimer's disease and Myasthenia Gravis. He was on the editorial boards of a number of major journals in the fields of neurosciences

and biochemistry, and a member of several prestigious professional societies including the Michael J. Fox Parkinson's Foundation.

Dear Al - all who have known you join your wife Dorothy, sons Cameron and Adam, daughter Erica Fields, and three grandchildren, Simon and Veronica Stracher and Ari Fields, in a celebration of your humanity, friendship, and contributions to our world and society.

Abraham Shulman, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Photo:

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