

OBITUARY

In memory of a scientist and friend*Oncogene* (2005) **24**, 313. doi:10.1038/sj.onc.1208253**Alexander G Tatosyan, 1952–2004**

It is still hard to believe that on June 5, Alexander Tatosyan passed away. He was an outstandingly bright scientist and a dear friend, who always irradiated benevolence, infectious optimism, an appreciation for life, an elegant self-irony and a wonderful sense of humor. He died in Moscow, Russia, where he lived and worked during the last 30 years of his short life. Sasha was the soul of our generation of scientists who worked in the field of cancer research in Russia. His large laboratory in the Institute of Carcinogenesis at National Cancer Research has been the center for oncogene research in Russia, the place where numerous successful scientists, now working all over the world, received their education, knowledge, inspiration, taste and sense of experimental oncology.

Armenian by blood, Sasha Tatosyan was born in 1952 in Yerevan, Armenia, at that time one of the republics of the former Soviet Union. His entry into science was quite unusual: his talent and persistence towards biological research became obvious so early that already after the first year of studies at the Faculty of Biology at

Yerevan University, he continued his education within a special individualized program in Moscow in the Ivanovsky Institute of Virology, one of the top academic institutions of former USSR. After graduation with honors in 1974, he made it all the way from lab technician to an independent internationally recognized investigator, professor, Chairman of Academic Counsel and the leader of one of the most productive labs of his Institute. During all this time, he was applying molecular biology analysis to unique experimental models created by Russian experimental oncology. His work was largely devoted to oncogenic retroviruses and oncogenes with a primary focus on Src and its role in transformation and metastasis. His remarkable work on the mutagenic effect of Src in transgenic *Drosophila* put him among a very few Russian scientists who, in the mid-1980s, managed to publish in *Nature*. His international recognition was growing – he successfully worked in leading institutes in Czech Republic, France and the US – and each visit resulted in the establishment of fruitful collaborations, joint grants and expectations of new visits; and, of course, great, unforgettable memories of meeting a most remarkable colleague who became forever a friend.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the educational mission of Sasha Tatosyan, who has become a ‘scientific father’ for many talented Soviet-born researchers who now work in scientific centers all over the world. Sasha was warmly welcomed in every place he visited and had numerous opportunities to leave the country and establish a successful research career in the West, as did numerous leading Russian scientists of his generation. Nevertheless, he chose to stay and continue his work in incomparably more difficult conditions. His decision was primarily driven by the responsibility for his students – present and future – who, therefore, were given the opportunity to do state-of-the-art molecular cancer research of outstanding quality, as exemplified by the paper published in this issue of *Oncogene* (see also Commentary of his former student Elena Feinstein). Now this mission is over, Sasha’s place is empty and we all – his colleagues, friends, present and former students and co-workers – are grieving with his family for this unrecoverable loss.

Andrei Gudkov