

Obituary

Maharaj K Ticku, 1948–2007

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Dr Raj Ticku, at age 59, died unexpectedly in San Diego on 6 November 2007 while attending the Annual Meeting of the Society for Neuroscience. His passing away is a big loss in the field neuropharmacology and to the alcohol research community in particular. In addition to his research contributions to molecular neurobiology, Raj was a critical leader at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. He was an excellent teacher and played a key role in the recruitment of new talent to the Center and led many faculty and chair searches. Dr Cigarroa, the President of UTHSC, spoke passionately about Raj: 'This is a huge loss for the UT Health Science Center community, as well as to the scientific world. Not only was Dr Ticku a wonderful human being, he also made significant scientific discoveries regarding alcohol and other drug abuse. As a scientist and as my friend, he will be greatly missed by all of us at the Health Science Center.'

Dr Ticku was born in India and moved to the United States in 1970 after graduating with Honors in Pharmacy from the Birla Institute of Technology and Science in Pilani,

India. After obtaining an MS in Pharmacology from the University of Oklahoma, he obtained his PhD in Biochemical Pharmacology from the State University of New York, Buffalo, in 1976. He then joined Richard Olsen's group at UCLA, where he began his pioneering work on the pharmacology and physiology of γ -aminobutyric acid and *N*-methyl-D-aspartic acid receptors. It is difficult to realize how little was known about γ -aminobutyric acid receptors when Raj began his studies of these receptors, and how much his work has changed the field. He published a paper in 1980 titled 'The effects of acute and chronic ethanol administration and its withdrawal on gamma-aminobutyric acid receptor binding in rat brain', which presaged the next decades of alcohol research. A particularly seminal contribution was the 1981 paper on 'Histidine modification with diethyl pyrocarbonate shows heterogeneity of benzodiazepine receptors'. This work amazingly predicted what receptor cloning and sequencing would require another decade to reveal, that the α -subunits of the γ -aminobutyric acid-A receptor vary in a critical histidine that determines their drug sensitivity. He remained on the leading edge of investigations into *N*-methyl-D-aspartic acid and γ -aminobutyric acid-A receptor expression, trafficking, and phosphorylation, with important recent contributions in all these areas. NIAAA honored Raj and his research program with a prestigious MERIT Award, which was to provide funding until 2010.

Raj Ticku spent his entire faculty career at UTHSC from 1978 to the present, rising through the ranks and becoming Professor at the Departments of Pharmacology as well as Psychiatry in 1986. He served on numerous NIH study sections and served as a journal referee for many prestigious national and international scientific journals. He was known for his tremendous enthusiasm for life, his distinct laughter, his love for and extensive knowledge of different foods and cuisines, and above all his inquisitiveness of science and respect for his fellow scientists. His passion for creativity in research will live on through the many students and postdoctoral fellows he mentored.

Raj was also a loving father to his two daughters, Leslie and Shara. Raj experienced considerable challenges in his life, but he did not want to burden his friends with his tragedies and always looked to the future rather than the past. We admired Raj as a wonderful person, as a father, and as a dedicated scientist. We are fortunate, indeed, that he was a part of our lives and his memory will be cherished by all who had the privilege to be close to him.

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