

OBITUARY

Professor Alan M Gewirtz (1949–2010)

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Alan M Gewirtz was 61 years of age when he died on 17 November 2010. Alan's death came as a shock and brought sorrow to the Myb research community, and we would like to acknowledge him for the significant contributions he made over several decades of tireless research. Alan held the C. Willard Robinson Professorship of Hematology-Oncology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and published consistently in high-level journals in the fields of hematology and oncology. His major influence was in his pioneering leadership in the clinical development of antisense oligonucleotide therapies, opening up the possibility of targeting nuclear factors like c-Myb and oncogenic fusion proteins such as BCR-ABL. He also played important roles by sponsoring younger researchers, by supporting a series of fabulous Myb workshops that took place in Australia, the UK and Italy, and through his involvement in the Lymphoma and Leukemia Foundation.

Alan was born in New York City and received a bachelor's degree in marine biology at Colgate University in 1971 followed by a medical degree at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1976. He worked as an instructor at the Yale University School of Medicine before starting his own lab at Temple University School of Medicine. He was the recipient of many awards, including the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's Distinguished Clinical Scientist Award, an honorary doctorate from the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin, Poland, and an excellence in research award from the American Society of Hematology. Alan had a clear vision and pioneering drive for clinical and commercial translation with invention rights to nine patents. His membership on the editorial boards of journals such as *Cancer Gene Therapy*, *Leukemia*, *Experimental Hematology* and the

Journal of Clinical Investigation reflect upon the esteem to which he was held.

Alan and colleagues were the first to demonstrate that c-Myb expression was essential in normal hematopoietic cells, and he must have taken pride as the role of Myb expanded from its beginnings in chicken retrovirus-induced leukemias to confirmation of its role in human leukemias, as well as colon, breast, and head and neck cancers. Similarly, we think he must have been pleased that targeting messenger RNA in cancers with antisense oligonucleotides has now progressed to the use of small interfering RNAs and microRNAs, keeping the dream alive that a strategy he helped pioneer may find its way into the clinic to treat cancer patients.

We remember fondly his contributions to conferences, his wit, love of scientific debate and most of all his generosity. He will be missed and long remembered from all corners of the globe and we pass on our best wishes to his family and other close friends.

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