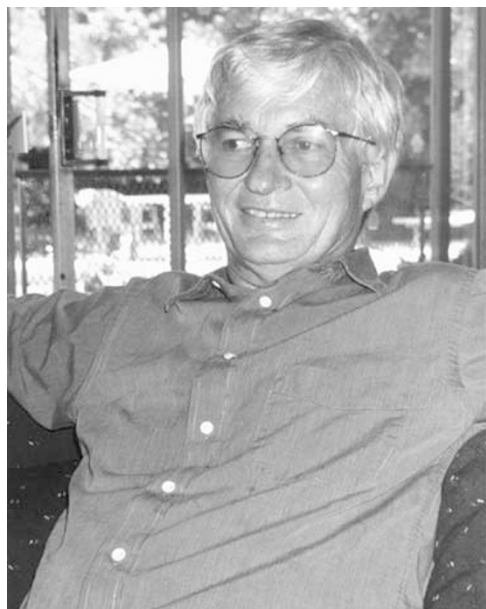


## Obituary

### J Christian Gillin, 1938–2003

*Neuropsychopharmacology* (2004) 29, 1215–1216.  
doi:10.1038/sj.npp.1300359



J Christian Gillin, MD, a longstanding Fellow and very committed participant in the ACNP and Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), died peacefully with his family around him on Saturday, September 13, 2003. He had been battling esophageal cancer for more than 3 years.

Chris was internationally known and widely honored for his seminal research on sleep and mood disorders. In 2001, he was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine in recognition of his contributions to the advancement of sleep medicine. He was also awarded the Distinguished Scientist Award of the Sleep Research Society. In presenting the award in 2001, the Sleep Research Society noted, 'in addition to the immense scientific contributions Dr Gillin has made to the field of sleep and sleep disorders, one of his greatest accomplishments is in the number of students he has trained. Many investigators in this next generation of sleep researchers can trace their scientific roots back to Dr Gillin.'

Born in Columbus, Ohio, he credited his anthropologist father for sparking his interest in mental illness and being an academic at an early age. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University and earned his MD at Case Western Reserve, completed his psychiatric training at Stanford University Medical Center and then accepted a position at the NIMH Intramural Research Program (IRP), where he worked very productively from 1971 to 1982.

During his early years at the NIMH IRP, his research focus was on schizophrenia, where he together with collaborators explored the rather 'hot', at the time, transmethylation hypothesis, concluding that the evidence did not support this as an etiology for schizophrenia. However, his career in sleep research, which would become his legacy, began with Bill Dement, when Chris was a psychiatry resident at Stanford. His interest and career in sleep continued when he was assigned in 1982 to Fred Snyder's Sleep Laboratory in the IRP. Over the next 20 years at the IRP, Chris became known as one of the world's pre-eminent and most respected sleep researchers. In 1982, he was recruited to the UCSD Department of Psychiatry, serving us for two decades as a senior Professor and Director of both the NIMH Clinical Research Center (MHCRC) and the Psychobiological and Psychopharmacology Research Training Fellowship.

While at NIMH, Chris Gillin's group was the first to replicate the finding of short REM latency (the elapsed time between the onset of sleep and the first REM period) in major depressives when compared to normal controls. In his studies, however, he also included patients with primary insomnia, since he was concerned about issues of diagnostic sensitivity and specificity. Based on his analysis using a number of objective sleep measures, he was able to correctly identify normal controls, depressed patients, and primary, nondepressed insomniacs with about 75% accuracy. In 1992, Chris wrote the first major meta-analysis of sleep and psychiatric disorders, which firmly established that short REM latency and other sleep disturbances were not diagnostically specific in major depressive disorders. This meta-analysis was very influential and changed the landscape regarding the diagnostic specificity of sleep measures in depression.

In addition to the comparisons between patients with major depression and normal controls, Chris's publications were among the few early papers on polygraphic sleep in bipolar depression and on longitudinal studies of sleep of bipolar patients undergoing the 'switch process' between depression and mania. Using detailed observations of sleep in hospitalized bipolar depressives, he noted that a reduction in the duration of sleep predicted a switch from depression to mania, that switches at night were associated with higher ratings of mania than those during the day and evening, and that 48-h cyclers almost always switched at night.

Throughout his scientific career, Chris Gillin remained convinced that sleep abnormalities have important implications for the pathophysiological and clinical aspects of mood disorders, even if they are not diagnostically specific. Using a variety of strategies and methods, he systematically made incremental contributions to the scientific literature linking sleep and depression. For example, he developed and applied the following probes into the pathophysiological mechanisms of sleep in depressed patients: the Cholinergic REM Induction Test (CRIT) to delineate the

role of acetylcholine; the use of a tryptophan-free drink protocol to assess serotonin function; as well as the use of fMRI and PET to evaluate the effects of sleep deprivation in the brains of depressed patients. In addition, he worked very effectively using translational strategies, which reciprocated between human and rodent studies of sleep. From his very productive rodent sleep laboratory, he was among the first to identify a cholinergic pathway originating in the penunculo-portine tegmentum and the lateral tegmentum that was critical in inducing and sustaining REM sleep.

During recent years, Chris became very intrigued with the antidepressant effects of sleep deprivation in depressed patients, which struck him as a neglected area of research in biological psychiatry. It was the only reliable method in which depression could be reversed within hours. He believed that sleep deprivation was an excellent model for the study of antidepressant treatments, that could lead to new, rapidly acting treatments, based on new models of brain function. It was this hypothesis, together with other studies of chronobiology and light therapy of depression, which were the focus of his science during the last few years.

Chris Gillin was the past-president of the Sleep Research Society, the Society for Light Treatment and Biological Rhythms, and the West Coast College of Biological Psychiatry, and was on the board of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. He was a longtime Fellow of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology and served on the Council. He was also a longstanding member of the Society of Biological Psychiatry and received the Society's Gold Medal for Lifetime Scientific Achievement in 2002. At the time of his death, he was also the Co-Director of the Laboratory of Sleep and Chronobiology, which he helped establish as a significant component of the UCSD General Clinical Research Center.

Shortly after his diagnosis of esophageal cancer, the UCSD Department of Psychiatry organized a Festschrift to recognize the enormous impact that Chris had on the fields of sleep, mood disorders, and circadian rhythms. He was honored with a scientific symposium and a dinner to celebrate his life, which was attended by approximately 200 scientists. The event highlighted the friendships, scholarship, and leadership, which had bonded colleagues to Chris around the nation and the world. The papers presented at the Festschrift were edited and organized in a scientific monograph published in a special issue of the ACNP journal *Neuropsychopharmacology*, for which he served as Founding Editor.

Chris's love of family, friends and the outdoors seemed to intensify after he was diagnosed with advanced cancer 3 years ago. He lived these last years by making everyday count, continuing his scientific endeavors, mentoring, and publishing. An avid runner, he had completed the Bay to Breakers Race in San Francisco just a few weeks before his diagnosis. A week after he learned he had cancer, he went paragliding for the first time. He remained active during his battle with the disease, and shortly before his death he went flying with a young friend. He even lectured very recently to UCSD medical students on the subject of death and dying, to share his personal experiences and insights.

The breadth and the sheer quantity of his scholarly output was overwhelming with over 500 peer-reviewed, high-quality, scientific articles appearing in journals such as

*Science, Nature, Neuroscience, Archives of General Psychiatry, Neuropsychopharmacology*, and other journals as well and one book. He was a consummate original scholar with high energy, enthusiasm, and creativity, and at the same time rigorous and scientifically critical and skeptical. He was enormously generous with his time for collaborators, trainees, and students. This generosity, ready availability, his prodigious intellect, and very human touch, all combined to make him a uniquely gifted and effective teacher.

All his friends and colleagues recall Chris's fundamental dignity, humanity, and positive approach to life, coupled with an unquenchable scientific curiosity. He was an admired role model and inspired deep affection among those who knew him and worked with him.

He is survived by his wife, Frances Davis Gillin, PhD, Professor of Pathology at UCSD, and their two sons, Lorin and Peter, and daughter-in-law, Crystal. The family requests that for those wishing to make donations in memory of Dr Gillin, they be made to the 'SRS Gillin Jr Faculty Award' which can be sent to: Judy Milton, Sleep Research Society, One Westbrook Corporate Center, Westchester, IL 60154, with a note stating the purpose of the donation.

Lewis L Judd and The ACNP Group<sup>1</sup>  
Department of Psychiatry,  
University of California,  
San Diego, USA

#### Editorial Note

*J. Christopher Gillin, MD became the founding Editor-in-Chief of Neuropsychopharmacology, the flagship journal of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) in 1987. All of the subsequent Editors and all ACNP members owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for the remarkable job he accomplished in launching the journal. Without his tireless efforts imploring his talented friends and colleagues to submit their best manuscripts to this new entry in the field, we would not be in the position we currently enjoy as one of the top journals in neuroscience, pharmacology, and psychiatry. On behalf of the Field Editors and Editorial Board, I extend our collective sympathy to Chris' family and colleagues.*

Charles B Nemeroff  
Editor, *Neuropsychopharmacology*

<sup>1</sup>Hagop Akiskal, MD  
David Braff, MD  
David Feifel, MD, PhD  
Mark Geyer, PhD  
Igor Grant, MD  
Philip Groves, PhD  
Dilip Jeste, MD  
John Kelsoe, MD  
Ronald Kuczenski, PhD  
Nicholas Schork, PhD  
Marc A Schuckit, MD  
David Segal, PhD  
Murray Stein, MD  
Neal Swerdlow, MD  
Stephen Stahl, MD, PhD  
Ming T Tsuang, MD, PhD