

Obituary

Oakley Ray, 1931–2007

Neuropsychopharmacology (2008) 33, 2783–2784;
doi:10.1038/sj.npp.1301676



Oakley Ray, retired American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) secretary, died on 6 February 2007, at the age of 76 years. Even at the time of his death, few people of any age had more energy and gusto than Oakley. During his final battle with cancer, his resiliency was an inspiration to all who came to see him. With the full support of his wife Kathy, three children, and many grandchildren around him, he remained vitally interested in his work in psychopharmacology, and the ACNP in particular, to the very end. His last article was published 1 month after his death and was entitled 'About the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology' (*Academic Psychiatry*, 2007 31: 122–124). In it, he described the ACNP meeting as the finest of its type in the world. He wrote this in December 2005, as he was retiring from the position of secretary. After a thorough consideration of what made the ACNP the success that it is, he closed the article with a personal touch:

I had the good fortune to become a member of the ACNP in 1966 and served as the executive secretary from 1979 through 2005. Serving as executive secretary of the ACNP has had a great impact on my personal career. It has certainly given me national and international visibility and name recognition, which I would not have achieved otherwise. It has affected my status as a university departmental member since my time for academic committees was very limited, and my focus on the ACNP was not always appreciated by departmental

chairs or other faculty members. My 26-year tenure as executive secretary has been a real ball. It has given me the opportunity to work with outstanding scientists whom I admire and respect and from whom I could learn much. Most of them are outstanding human beings as well. It has been an honor and privilege for me.

Oakley had the longest tenure of any individual in any elected ACNP position. It is no exaggeration to say that he did the most from an organizational point of view of any of its members to make the ACNP the preeminent scientific society in its field. During his tenure, the size of the College more than doubled and the size of the annual meeting tripled from about 600 to more than 2000. Certainly, for those of a certain age, the ACNP meeting in San Juan, his favorite venue, with an occasional detour to Hawaii and even Las Vegas, was the meeting one longed to attend, and not just for the science. Beyond the superbly orchestrated scientific sessions, political point making, ethical probing, joyful welcoming parties, and end-of-meeting banquets were new programs like poster sessions, Teaching Day, special lectures, and travel award programs. Oakley Ray, through his knowledge and love of psychopharmacology, was the driving force behind establishing the Archives of Psychopharmacology for the ACNP. In recognition of this, the ACNP has decided to honor him by establishing the Oakley Ray History Lecture at the annual meeting. His tireless efforts on behalf of the ACNP and its members, indeed for the whole field of psychopharmacology, were enormously productive.

For 15 of the years when Oakley was achieving all of this for the ACNP, he was also helping the international counterpart of the ACNP, the CINF, as councillor to the president of the CINF and then as the first executive secretary of the CINF, a position he held for 4 years until his retirement just before the onset of his terminal illness. He saw to it that the CINF, like the ACNP, put high priority on educating young scientists and stimulating research in psychopharmacology throughout the world, especially in developing countries. This included helping China establish a national psychopharmacology society, which was not permitted by the central government without its affiliation with the CINF. One of his most enduring contributions to bring psychopharmacology around the world into a more collaborative mode was to organize a meeting of all national and regional psychopharmacology society presidents at the biennial meeting of the CINF. Beyond the ACNP and CINF, Oakley served to stimulate any number of other societies and meetings, including the International Psychogeriatric Society, The International Society of Clinical Trials, and special congress throughout the world.

Oakley Ray had an extraordinarily full life, one that took him to every part of the globe, by every means of transportation, including a much-traveled Harley Davidson motorcycle, his preferred means of locomotion. Science, helping people, building organizations, enjoying a good

wine, collecting objet d'art, teaching, writing on a grand and diverse scale, and fulfilling all the potential of his spectacular Nashville home filled his life and enriched all of that with an interest in seeing the field of neuropsychopharmacology achieve its goals in the nearly 50 years he devoted to it. His interest in psychopharmacology developed as he earned an AB from Cornell University in 1952 with a major in psychology. Already interested in both animal and human behavior, his love of research led him to obtain a PhD in psychology, which he did at the University of Pittsburgh between 1952 and 1958, rather than an MD. But his clinical interests were evident in his plans for translational research. He left Pittsburgh to go to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) for 2 more years of research training, which included collaborations in both basic and clinical research. Following this, he received his first academic appointment in the Department of Psychology, from which he had obtained his PhD at the University of Pittsburgh, followed by swift promotion and tenure. He left Pittsburgh in 1970 to become Professor of Psychology, Psychiatry, and Pharmacology at Vanderbilt, as well as Chief of Psychological Services and Chief of the Mental Health Unit Patient Care program at the Nashville VA (until 1987).

His teaching at Vanderbilt was superlative. His courses were always fully subscribed and his ability to inspire undergraduate and graduate student interests in psychology and research was legendary. He was given Vanderbilt's Ingalls Award for excellence in classroom teaching in 1972, and in 1979 he was awarded the particularly high Vanderbilt honor of the Chancellor's Cup for making the greatest contribution outside the classroom to student-faculty relationships. His courses served as the base for an extremely successful textbook, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behavior*, which was first published in 1972. It was adopted by more than 400 colleges and sold more than a half million

copies! It is now in its 12th edn, published in 2006, with two coauthors, Charles Ksir and Carl Hart. In addition to his scholarly writing, he published three books for general audiences: *The Good Life: How to Get It ... How to Keep It*, *Grandma's Rules for Good Health and Long Life*, and *Grandma's Rules for Understanding and Changing Behavior*. He was frequently asked by major media, including the BBC, *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, National Public Radio, and others, to comment on all manner of issues related to psychopharmacology or substance abuse, a topic he taught a full course on at Vanderbilt for many years. His skill at the lectern was exceptional, leading to invitations to speak at universities and to psychiatric groups throughout the world.

His research interests included the genetic and developmental determinants of brain function in animals and the effects of central nervous system drugs on behavior during development and maturity. He published 37 distinguished papers in behavioral pharmacology, three of which were published in *Science* and one in *Nature*. His collaborators included Larry Stein, Len Cook, and Robert Barrett, a postdoc from his Pittsburgh days, who he recruited to Vanderbilt.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American essayist, once wrote 'Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.' It is not clear if that was the source of Oakley's unique take on life and psychopharmacology, but it could have been. Along the trail that Oakley Ray blazed, the ACNP and CINP flourished, as did the knowledge and perspectives of his many students. A born showman, superb organizer, with boundless energy, he was one of a kind. He will be greatly missed.

Herbert Y Meltzer¹

¹Vanderbilt University Medical Center,
Psychopharmacology, Nashville, TN, USA