
IN MEMORIAM

Robert W. Downing, 1931–2002

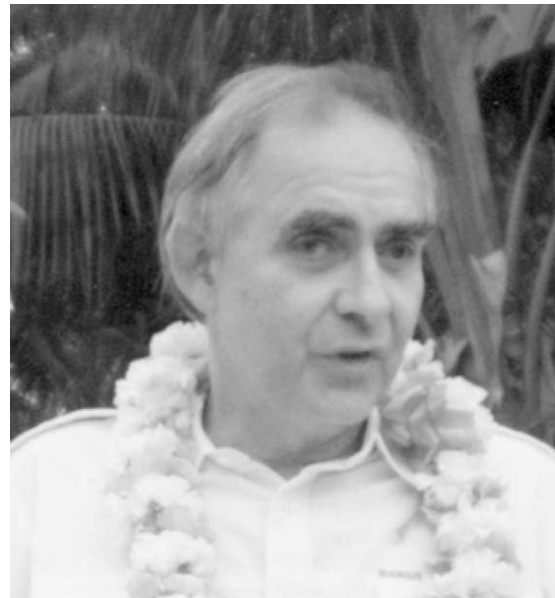
Robert W. Downing was accepted in the ACNP in 1975 and was a Member Emeritus at the time of his death in March 2002. Bob was born in Wilkes Barre, PA December 11, 1930. He was born with congenital cataracts, which later lead to detached retina, multiple surgeries, and in his adult life, blindness. All through his life he was challenged with being severely sight impaired.

As a child, Bob focused on reading and learning all he could. He became a “boy chemist” among other things and got into some trouble for his precocious nature, creating an explosion in which he lost some of his eyebrows. This experience and the fact that college education was not part of his family’s belief system, did not deter him from continuing his pursuit of higher learning.

Bob attended the University of Pennsylvania and graduated in 1952 with his B.A. and was elected into Phi Beta Kappa. In 1956 he earned his Ph.D. in psychology from Penn. Bob was very much interested in group psychotherapy for psychotic adult patients. He directed the group therapy programs of the inpatient unit for the Department of Psychiatry, which was housed at Mercy Douglas Hospital for a number of years, then moved to Philadelphia General Hospital and later, to the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

While Bob was a clinical psychologist at the Department of Psychiatry Inpatient Unit, he also worked with me in the Psychopharmacology Research Unit at the University of Pennsylvania. Bob taught me what I know about statistics and methodology. Under our NIMH grants, he developed a large program to study the effects of personality and attitudinal correlates to one response to drug therapy in psychiatric patients. A whole series of papers were written by us dealing with these issues. We were later joined by Raymond Cattell and studied the possible use of IPAT personality tests in psychiatric outpatient research.

The first paper that Bob and I published together appeared in the *Journal of Psychology* in 1962. Many of the important results, I believe, that Bob found were psychological dimensions related to treatment response such as verbal ability (intelligence), self evaluation, compliance, hostility, manifest anxiety, and self estimates of ego



strength. These are only some of the factors that Bob evaluated and studied for their effect on placebo and drug treatment outcome. Another large research area that Bob and I developed was the study of nonspecific factors on the treatment response in anxiety and depression. Again, we published frequently in this area.

From the early beginnings of psychopharmacology, Bob was well respected as a statistician and in the late 1960s, Bob wrote two papers on the assessment of side effects, comparing open ended and checklist methods. Jerome Levine who was head of the Psychopharmacology Research Center of NIMH in 1970 edited the important book entitled *Principles and Problems of Establishing the Efficacy of Psychotropic Agents*. He asked Bob to write a chapter on “Interpretation of Data from Investigations Assessing the Effectiveness of Psychotropic Agents.”

Bob was invited to write several chapters for other crucial books in the field because of his expertise in statistics and research background. One of the leading and

frequently quoted papers that he wrote was entitled, "Mixed Anxiety/Depression: Fact or Myth," published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* in 1974.

In the late 1970s, Bob, together with the NIMH, Hopkins, and Boston University, was involved in studying the pharmacotherapy of anxiety and depression, which demonstrated for the first time that imipramine had anti-anxiety properties. This led Bob to obtain an RO-1 to study imipramine in patients diagnosed with GAD. The study was started by Bob and completed by me after Bob went on disability. The results were published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* in 1993 under the title, "Antidepressants for the Treatment of Generalized Anxiety Disorder: A Placebo-Controlled Comparison of Imipramine, Trazodon, and Diazepam." It is one of the seminal papers leading to the series of studies demonstrating that newer antidepressants have anxiolytic properties.

Bob went on disability after becoming completely blind, despite many laser surgeries. In later years, Bob also battled Parkinson's Disease. Even while combating these challenges, Bob still strove to learn. Bob taught himself the German language and also tried to master Greek and Japanese. His love of coin and stamp collecting continued along with his enjoyment of gardening and cooking. He owned a machine that read text so he could keep up with

his study of mathematics and statistics. He also listened to unabridged books on tape, the most recent he completed included *Beautiful Mind* and *Galileo's Daughter*.

Throughout his battle with Parkinson's, Bob never succumbed to being limited by it. He was stubbornly determined to retain all his faculties and kept his low spirit to a minimum—forever moving forward with a positive outlook. He maintained his independence as well even though he was completely blind. He used a rope to guide him in his home so he would not be dependent on anyone to get around.

Dr. Robert W. Downing died March 15, 2002, at his home in Wynecote, PA. He was 71 years old. He is survived by his wife, Elma; his son, David; his granddaughter, Hannah Rose; and his ex-wife, Mildred.

Bob was an esteemed colleague, teacher, collaborator, and friend. His contributions to the field, his determination to learn all he could, and his ability to live his life to the fullest, speak volumes of the person he was and the person I will remember.

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