

In Memoriam Joel Elkes

Neuropsychopharmacology (2016) 41, 1189–1190; doi:10.1038/npp.2016.6



Editorial note: The ACNP's first president, Dr Joel Elkes, died on 30 October 2015, just a few weeks away from his 102nd birthday. While we normally print all 'In Memoriam' articles together in our December issues, we think it is appropriate to publish this one as soon as it became available to us, as a special tribute to his unique and enduring contributions to our College.

Joel Elkes, a founding member and first president of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP), passed away on 30 October 2015 in Sarasota, Florida. He was 101 years old and led an alert, full and creative life until his last moments. He remained active in the ACNP for over 50 years initiating the Joel Elkes young scientist research award in 1986 (three recipients have gone on to the presidency of the ACNP thus far), speaking about the history of the ACNP in the 1990's, and joining the 50th anniversary meeting in 2011 by video skype and providing a separate video-taped message to the membership. His pioneering achievements have led to receipt of many awards and the accolade 'Father of Neuropsychopharmacology' (Elkes and Finean, 1952; Bradley and Elkes, 1953; Elkes and Elkes, 1954; Bradley and Elkes, 1957; Elkes, 1971, 1995; Rubin *et al*, 1975; Ban, 2001; Elkes, 2011; Blackwell, 2015; Carey, 2015; Kelly, 2015).

He was a scientist, a mentor, a humanistic educator, and an artist. As a scientist trained in pharmacology, his pioneering work led to the establishment, at the University of Birmingham, UK, of the world's first department of experimental psychiatry; one that focused on neurophysiology and neurochemistry. In 1951, as its psychiatry department chair, he introduced the neuroscience paradigm into psychiatry. His early contributions on the functioning of regional chemical fields in the brain and of neuroregulation appeared at a time when signal transduction in the brain was just being understood as chemically mediated. With colleagues he studied myelin, the effects of centrally acting drugs on the electrical activity of the brain in conscious animals, and mapped the cholinesterases involved in the breakdown of acetylcholine, the first neurotransmitter to be identified. Such

research linked molecular changes in the brain to behavior and paved the way forward for behavioral pharmacology. Concurrently in 1951 he and his physician wife, Charmian, co-authored and published the first controlled scientific study of chlorpromazine in the management of chronic psychosis in schizophrenia in the *British Medical Journal*; this study set the stage for future double blind placebo controlled research for psychiatric drugs. During those productive years he organized the first international meeting on neurochemistry. He was a founding member of the Council of the International Brain Research Organization.

His pioneering efforts in Birmingham led to his appointment in 1957 to the NIMH (at St Elizabeth's Hospital) as the first director of the NIMH Clinical Neuropharmacology Research Center. There he led research activity to integrate basic and clinical research. His research agenda focused on identifying cellular dysfunction, regional brain dysregulation, and disturbed brain physiology, all of which may underlie the major mental illnesses.

In 1963, the year after the first ACNP meeting, he followed Seymour Kety as Psychiatry Department Chair at Johns Hopkins; there he sought to further integrate clinical science and neuroscience by blending his interests in neurochemistry, behavior and humanistic psychiatric treatments. He renamed the department as the '*Department of the Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences*', recruiting Joseph Brady as director of a new Division of Behavioral Biology. Brady joined faculty members Jerome Frank, Horsley Gantt, and Curt Richter. Joel's research interests led him to initiate the Johns Hopkins MD/PhD program in behavioral sciences.

His humanistic approach to patient care included resident seminars on psychopharmacology and on the psychology of what is therapeutic, embedded in a Tavistock therapeutic milieu model for ward management. His syntheses following each grand rounds presentation were brilliant summations of the science and art of psychiatry. Joel was named distinguished service professor emeritus at Johns Hopkins when he stepped down as department chair in 1974 and the Neuroscience Laboratories in Psychiatry were named after him.

His enduring legacy there and at the NIMH lies in leaders who he recruited, influenced, and championed. Among them are Floyd Bloom during the NIMH years; and during his time at Johns Hopkins, Ross Baldessarini, Solomon Snyder, Joseph Coyle, Elliot Richelson, and Ray DePaulo.

After leaving Hopkins he continued his focus on psychopharmacology and humanistic education as professor in Residence at McMaster University in 1974, where he initiated the Brain and Behavior Program; at the University of Louisville in 1980, where he helped establish the Genesis Center and initiated an annual humanistic summer health awareness workshop for medical students with Leah Dickstein (Dickstein and Elkes, 1986); and in 1990 became a Founding Fellow and Senior Scholar in Residence at the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

His international efforts led to founding the *National Institute for Psychobiology* at the Hebrew University in Israel, with Charles Smith. Joel was honored with a lifetime achievement award on his 101 birthday at the National Academy of Sciences for his contributions to Israel.

In his final years, with the encouragement of his wife Sally he turned to painting and exhibited in the US and Israel; one of his paintings is displayed in the office of the President of Israel. His last art exhibit, a museum retrospective of his work at a gallery in Sarasota, *Gardens of the Mind*, was intended to celebrate his 102nd birthday. When he died 2 weeks before his birthday, the museum exhibit instead was the site of a memorial service in his honor that celebrated his life.

The loss of his father, Elkhanan Elkes a leading Lithuanian Jewish physician, and family members at the Dachau concentration camp during the Holocaust was the defining event of Joel's lifetime and a source of considerable suffering. His wife Sally Lucke Elkes tells us a painting he completed in the last weeks of his life of 'Souls arising from the trenches of the Holocaust' provided him solace.

His friends and family members remember his genuine warmth and caring for them. His wife, daughter Anna Parris, and granddaughter Laura Parris survive him. Alert to the last moments Joel died peacefully holding the hands of his wife and granddaughter.



Centenarian Joel Elkes and Sally Lucke Elkes

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Elkes J, Finean JB (1952). Some observations on the structure of myelin. *Proc R Soc Med* **45**: 670.
- Bradley PB, Elkes J (1953). The effect of atropine, hyoscyamine, physostigmine and neostigmine on the electrical activity of the brain of the conscious cat. *J Physiol* **120**: 14P–15P.
- Elkes J, Elkes C (1954). Effect of chlorpromazine on the behavior of chronically overactive psychotic patients. *Br Med J* **2**: 560–565.
- Bradley PB, Elkes J (1957). The effects of some drugs on the electrical activity of the brain. *Brain* **80**: 77–117.
- Elkes J (1971). On beginning of a new science; personal recollections. In: Ayd FJ, Blackwell B (eds). *Discoveries in Biological Psychiatry*. Lippincott JB: Philadelphia.
- Rubin RR, Elkes J, Maris RW, Dietz PE (1975). Medicine and the behavioral sciences: the Johns Hopkins M.D.—Ph.D. program. *Johns Hopkins Med J* **136**: 268–270.
- Dickstein LJ, Elkes JA (1986). Health awareness workshop: enhancing coping skills in medical students. In: Scott CD, Hawk J (eds). *Heal Thyself: The Health of Health Care Professionals*. Brunner/Mazel: New York.
- Elkes J (1995). Psychopharmacology: finding one's way. *Neuropsychopharmacol* **12**: 93–111.
- Ban TA (ed) (2001). *Forward in 'Selected Writings of Joel Elkes.'* Budapest, Animula. Collegium Neuro-psychomacoloium (CINP) Publisher: East Kilbride, Scotland, UK.
- Elkes J. *Interview with Fridolin Sulzer in 'The Oral History of Neuropsychopharmacology.'* Vol 1 et seq (volume editor E Shorter). American College of Neuropsychopharmacology. 2011.
- Blackwell B (2015). *Joel Elkes: an integrative life*. On INHN.org in Biographies. August 20, 2015.
- Carey B (2015). *Joel Elkes, who shed light on psychosis, dies at 101*. Obituary New York Times. November 17, 2015.
- Kelly J (2015). *Joel Elkes who advanced research in brain chemistry dies*. Obituary Baltimore Sun. November 25, 2015.

James Harris^{*,1}

¹Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences,
The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine,
Psychiatric Residency Johns Hopkins Hospital (1972–1976),
Baltimore, MD, USA
E-mail: jharrisd@jhmi.edu