

In the news

ELI SERCARZ'S LEGACY

Eli Sercarz, who died 3 November 2009 at the age of 75, was “one of the most highly esteemed immunologists in the world” said Jonathan Braun, of University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), USA, where Sercarz spent most of his career (*Los Angeles Times*, 21 Nov 2009). “Few men can claim such a huge legacy of scientific achievement; fewer still will be so widely remembered and missed”, added Braun. His contributions to understanding the concepts behind autoimmune disease have defined our current knowledge.

Sercarz introduced the terms dominant and cryptic epitopes and the concept of determinant spreading. He used these to describe how the adaptive immune response tends to focus initially on a few dominant epitopes but can become primed to respond to cryptic epitopes exposed during a response through determinant spreading. Dominance and crypticity are relevant to vaccination and autoimmunity. Recounting his achievements in *Nature Immunology* (17 Dec 2009), Irun Cohen, a friend and colleague of Sercarz, describes how his studies “greatly influenced the thinking of many immunologists” and brought about ideas that are “now standard concepts in immunology discourse”.

The tone for a distinguished career was set from the start, publishing his first piece of postgraduate research in *Nature* in 1959 (*Telegraph.co.uk*, 26 Nov 2009). He went on to author over 370 publications, train more than 100 scientists, spend time in the UK and France, before joining UCLA and eventually rising to the rarely achieved rank of Professor Above Scale.

Beyond his significant scientific achievements, Cohen describes that “His demeanour was marked by a joy in living, which he expressed with spirited dancing whenever the occasion arose” (*Nature Immunol.*, 17 Dec 2009). I too was lucky enough to witness such exuberance at the Aegean conference on autoimmunity just one month before he died.

Lucy Bird