



IN MEMORIAM

Ting-Kai Li, M.D

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Ting-Kai Li, M.D., Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism from 2002–2008, died on 18 November 2018, at the age of 84. At the time of his passing, Dr. Li was a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University and had been an Associate Dean for Research at the IU School of Medicine and Distinguished Professor since 1985.

Ting-Kai Li, universally known as T-K., was born in Nanjing, China, and emigrated to South Africa where he attended the University of Witwatersrand, and then to the United States where he earned his undergraduate degree at Northwestern University. Dr. Li received his MD from Harvard in 1959 and subsequently was Chief Resident at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. Following his residency, he remained at Harvard for 7 years as a postdoctoral fellow and as an Associate in Medicine, and subsequently worked at the Nobel Medical Institute in Stockholm and Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, in Washington, D.C. On joining Indiana University, he established a research program on the biologic bases of alcoholism. Under his leadership, alcoholism research at IU became world-renowned. At IU and throughout his career, he mentored and supported many young faculty, and the IU program was the starting point and destination for outstanding investigators too numerous to name in full, but including John Nurnberger, Howard Edenberg, Holly Thomason, Lawrence Lumeng, David Crabb, Tatiana Foroud, William McBride, Vijay Ramchandani, Sean

O'Connor, and Lucinda Carr. As NIAAA Director, Dr. Li promoted collaborative international research, established trans-NIH initiatives, and drew special attention to the problem of drinking among college students and adolescents. After his time as NIAAA Director, Dr. Li joined the Duke University of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry as a Professor, retiring in 2013.

Dr. Li was a member of the American Society for Clinical Investigation, a Fellow Emeritus of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, and was elected to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences in 1999. He was president of the Research Society on Alcoholism and editor of the journal of that society, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*. His many honors included the RSA Distinguished Researcher Award, now given annually with a memorial lecture-ship in his name.

Dr. Li was a pioneer and forceful advocate for the role of genetics in alcoholism. Most rats do not like to voluntarily consume alcohol, impeding studies on alcoholism in this important model organism. However, at Walter Reed, Dr. Li used artificial selection to create an animal model of voluntary alcohol consumption, the alcohol preferring rat. This model became the basis for studies on alcoholism worldwide, directly led to the discovery of physiological processes and genes influencing risk, and contributed to the development of new medications. Dr. Li characterized the structure and functional dynamics of common genetic variants of alcohol dehydrogenase, the enzyme that primarily catalyzes the first step in alcohol metabolism. Dr. Li, and his competitors in this early gene race, established that these variants are important risk factors in alcoholism, and as has been validated in the present-day era of genome-wide genetic studies. T-K, with his sharp wit, humor, and broad perspective, was a role model and inspiration to a generation of geneticists, including myself. His research and leadership advanced our understanding of alcohol use disorder as a disease whose basis is genes and physiology, as well as choice, and thereby helped dispel stigma that to this day impedes recognition and treatment of alcoholism and other addictions.

Ting-Kai Li is survived by his daughters Karen and Jennifer, his sister Yuling Wei, his grandchildren Kristin, Kaitlyn, Jennifer, Megan, Theodore and Thomas, and his wife of 58 years, Susan Ning Li.

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