



## IN MEMORIAM

## In Memoriam—Donald M. Gallant, M.D.

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Donald (Don) Gallant, M.D. passed away in Memphis, Tennessee on March 11, 2020 at the age of 90 years. Don was a Life Fellow Emeritus of the ACNP and a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology at the Tulane University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, LA, where he continued to carry out research and to teach medical students and residents until Hurricane Katrina destroyed his home in New Orleans. He and his wife Joyce relocated to Memphis where Don continued to teach and care for patients at the University of Tennessee until his death. Don was born and raised in Brooklyn but moved to New Orleans at the age of 17 years to attend college and medical school at Tulane.

Despite his many years in New Orleans he never lost his New York accent and “charm”. A typical New Yorker, Don was often blunt and outspoken, but he had a huge heart and was a devoted friend and mentor to literally hundreds of medical students and residents, including me.

Don was the proverbial “triple threat”, a superb researcher, a compassionate, and effective clinician and an inspiring teacher and mentor. Don began his professional career in psychiatry just as chlorpromazine was introduced in the USA as the first effective antipsychotic agent. Parenthetically, during medical school Don spent a summer at a state mental hospital near Buffalo where severely ill schizophrenic patients routinely received insulin shock therapy which was in vogue in those days and where Don’s job was to administer a viscous glucose solution to bring patients out of their coma before they started to convulse. This experience cemented Don’s passion and commitment for finding better treatments for patients with severe mental illness, including those with schizophrenia and substance abuse.

In an era of psychiatry dominated by extreme somatic therapies on the one hand and psychoanalysis on the other, Don nonetheless became one of the early “biological” psychiatrists convinced that schizophrenia and other major mental disorders had a molecular

and metabolic basis and for his entire career embodying a very eclectic “medical model” of treatment intervention. Something routine today, but rare in his day.

At Tulane, Don was heavily influenced by Bob Heath, another pioneer of biological psychiatry, and with Bob he carried out some of the earliest work (arguably 50 years before its time) on depth electrode recordings and stimulation from/to a variety of subcortical brain regions in patients with schizophrenia and mood disorders. Using this approach Don and Bob were among the first to directly stimulate the amygdala and reliably elicit fear and anxiety as well as anger, depending on the exact electrode placement. These studies solidified Don’s interest in clinical research and together with Mel Bishop and others at Tulane he established one of the premier psychopharmacology research programs in the country.

Don’s major scientific contributions were in systematically and rigorously characterizing the efficacy and safety of a large number of psychopharmacological drugs introduced in the wake of chlorpromazine and imipramine in the 50s and 60s, employing rigorous double blind, placebo controlled trials which, in contrast to the early era of psychopharmacology, have now become the gold standards of the field. Don was a clinical trialist *par excellence* whose careful work on a variety of then recently introduced phenothiazines, butyrophenones, and thioxanthenes, established their relative efficacy and importantly in some cases, their idiosyncratic safety profiles. While Don carried out much of this work in partnership with pharmaceutical companies, he was never unduly influenced by the companies who sponsored these trials, only by the data and his unbiased interpretation of the findings and what they meant to the patients they were ultimately intended to benefit.

Finally, it is impossible to celebrate and remember Don’s life without reflecting on the mutual love and admiration he had for/with his many students and residents. He was an inspiring teacher who, as the Director of Medical Student Education, received the outstanding clinical teaching award every single year from 1976 through 1991 when he retired from the full-time faculty at Tulane. I can recall with great fondness my rotation with Don at the state psychiatric hospital in Mandeville, LA, where Don treated patients with severe alcohol use disorder (skid row alcoholics to be more precise!) using a combination of group therapy and Antabuse\*. These were difficult patients to say the least, but Don never lost hope or his commitment to help the most severely afflicted and downtrodden. Many of these patient’s lives were literally saved by Don.

After these group therapy sessions Don would often take us students out to lunch at Antoine’s in the French Quarter, one of his favorite restaurants where he was well known to the waiters and maitre d’ and who usually had his favorite dishes prepared just prior to our arrival. Don was a gourmet of fine food and wine

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and enjoyed sharing both at his favorite New Orleans restaurants with his many friends and colleagues. Don was a very special friend and mentor. Once in preparation for a scientific meeting on depression he organized in New Orleans with his good friend and ACNP Life Fellow, George Simpson (a fellow gourmet and bon vivant), he gave this financially challenged medical student enough money to buy a nice suit so that I could be “presentable”

to the psychiatric luminaries he and George invited. Later, just after I graduated medical school, Don, his lovely wife Joyce, and his daughter Dianne served as witnesses and the only attendees at my wedding. Needless to say, my wife Jann and I enjoyed a wonderful wedding dinner afterwards! Don was a very special person who had an enormous impact on the lives of the many medical students and residents he trained over his long career and