IN MEMORIAM

In memoriam—C. James Klett, Ph.D

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C. James “Jim” Klett, Ph.D., was a Fellow Emeritus for ACNP and a giant among the first generation of psychopharmacologists. Many of us know him best by the company he kept: Leo Hollister, Jonathan Cole, John Overall, Gerry Klerman, just to name a few.

Jim’s passion was in statistics and clinical trials methodology. During his 25 years as Chief of the VA’s Central Neuropsychopharmacology Research Lab, he conducted multicenter clinical trials that made a difference in patient care. His study with Sam Kaim on alcohol withdrawal comparing four drugs, one still in use, was picked as one of NIAAA’s seminal articles on alcohol research.

Jim took me under his wings when Dr Jerome Jaffe asked him and Sam Kaim to organize the multicenter VA cooperative LAAM

(levacetylmethadol) study and he made me the study chair when Dr Kaim retired. I had no idea what Jim was teaching me, not knowing what a young researcher trained in this country was supposed to know. Years later I would hear about some new development in research methodology and recall what Jim had told me, years earlier.

Jim liked simple approaches to study results. Everybody in addiction research then used the proportion of “dirty”—positive for illicit drugs—vs. “clean”—no illicit drugs—urines to compare outcome, and there were lots of arguments about missing urines. Jim decided to reward a point to each “clean” sample and not worry about missing urines. In a 12-week trial with urine collected three times a week, every participant would get a score between 0 and 36. The study groups can then be compared. We called it the treatment effectiveness score. It still works now.

The two Multicenter LAAM trials provided critical data for LAAM’s eventual approval, almost 20 years later. The reviewer commented that they provided some of the best data even then.

Jim taught me that our funders not only supported us with resources, but placed their trust in us. That was true with Drs Jaffe and Leshner in our LAAM and buprenorphine work. Jim and Leo also taught me to always credit the VA’s contribution in our work.

Jim was unassuming but popular. Once at an ACNP meeting I said to him, “There must be six people at this meeting who do not know you”. He took a long sip on his beer and said, “May be ... 4”.

In the 1997 interview with Leo, Jim mentioned our getting a 5-year NIDA grant when the PI was in private practice and the Co-PI had retired. That grant initiated our buprenorphine research that provided critical data for its approval, and cultivated a new generation of research leaders like Peggy Compton and Steve Shoptaw. In that same interview, Jim gave me high marks. I asked him what made him decide I was worth his effort. He said, “Nothing. I thought you might be a nice young fellow to bring along to have a few beers with”.

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