



IN MEMORIAM



IN MEMORIAM—Jan Fawcett, MD

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Jan Fawcett died on May 9, 2022 at the age of 88 following a long period of declining health. He was an extraordinary leader and innovator in psychiatry, primarily in the area of mood disorders. At the time of his death he was a professor at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine.



He was raised in Hamburg, New York, which is just outside of Buffalo, and attended the Naval Academy in Annapolis. He then transferred to the University of Rochester where he received a B.S. He went on to Yale University for his M.D., and trained in psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco and University of Rochester.

Following completion of his psychiatry training, he became a clinical associate in the Intramural Research program at the National Institute of Mental Health where he shared an office with Fred Goodwin. He then went on to join Jim Maas at the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute for six years, and had collaborations with Maas, William Bunney, John Davis and others in research on the pathophysiology and treatment of depression, bipolar illness, and suicide. He developed a number of innovative approaches to the treatment of severe and treatment-resistant depression, including co-administration of amphetamines and monoamine oxidase inhibitors—which involved his patients staying in his office waiting room for several hours in order to monitor blood pressure.

In 1972 at the age of 38 he became the department chair at Rush Medical College and Presbyterian-St. Lukes Medical Center in Chicago, a position he held for 30 years. He built a strong research and clinical program there and served as principal investigator of many federally funded research grants, primarily on depression and bipolar disorder.

While at Rush, he asked one of the attendings, Katie Busch, a noted forensic psychiatrist, to go dancing on the night before her forensic board exam. She declined but suggested they go the following night. They did, and subsequently got married, and remained so until his death several decades later.

He moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2002, and worked part-time as a professor at the University of New Mexico. While there, he established a clinic for patients with treatment-resistant depression, and mentored trainees and young faculty.

Many of his research contributions came from his work as principal investigator of the Chicago site of the Clinical Studies of the NIMH Psychobiology of Depression Research Program. In this study, he collaborated with Eli Robins, Gerald Klerman, Robert Spitzer, Jean Endicott, George Winokur, Paula Clayton, William Coryell, Nancy Andreasen, Martin Keller, and many other investigators, including myself. This study changed how depression was regarded in the United States—as a recurrent and often chronic illness with considerable debility that was woefully under-treated. These findings led to a substantial revision of the nomenclature for depression which served as the basis for the mood disorders section of DSM III.

He and Katie conducted a landmark study of suicide in inpatients in psychiatric facilities, and found that co-existent severe combined depression and anxiety was a very important risk factor for suicide. He also wrote a seminal paper on the use of pramipexole in patients with highly treatment-resistant depression.

He was a doctor's doctor—the person to call to get advice about the most challenging patients. I certainly relied on him frequently—as a mentor and as a friend.

Jan had an extraordinary zest for life and joy. He loved skiing, and I have many wonderful memories of him on the slopes in his bright yellow jump suit. He even took up snowboarding when in his 70's, but it didn't last long. He got tired of sitting on his butt in the snow! He loved to eat and to taste new wines during his travels throughout the world.

Jan was an outstanding advocate for the mentally ill. He collaborated with two of his former patients to establish the National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association (now the Depressive and Bipolar Support Alliance). This major international advocacy and support organization was originally run out of the trunk of Marilyn Chambers car!

He was the recipient of the top awards for research on mood disorders, including the Anna-Monika, the Jan Fawcett Humanitarian Award (named for him) from the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, the lifetime research award from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and the Falcone Prize for Mood Disorders from the Brain and Behavior Research Foundation NARS.

Jan had many leadership positions. Among them was serving as the chair of the Mood Disorders Task Force for DSM V. He was the president of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, as well as others.

He was active in the ACNP where he was a fellow emeritus at the time of his death. He attending the meeting nearly every year. He was the chair of the Committee on Relationships with Advocacy Groups and chair of the Committee on Problems of Public Concern, and a member of the Task Force on Continuing Education.

He is survived by Katie Busch (his wife of over 30 years), three daughters and one son, and four grandchildren. He will be profoundly missed by them, by his many close friends and colleagues, his trainees, and the many, many patients whom he helped over the years.

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