

September 2, 2022

## Obituary – Dr. Pat McGeer

It is with sadness that we note the passing of Dr. Pat McGeer at age 95 the past week. Dr. McGeer was a long-standing member of the UBC Faculty of Medicine, and served in the past as head of the Division of Neuroscience, in the Department of Psychiatry. Pat McGeer was a remarkable man who was a success as a politician (he held several cabinet posts in British Columbia's Social Credit governments of the 1970's), an athlete (he was a member of Canada's basketball team at the 1948 Olympics in London), and a brain scientist. It is hard to imagine any other physician who has made such diverse contributions to BC and Canada. As a politician, he had an immense impact on British Columbia, having served in multiple provincial cabinet roles across parties in BC and having been a visionary and contributor of bold ideas. His drive and creativity were largely responsible for the development of the UBC campus-based hospital where he envisaged a unique blend of research and clinical care all being delivered seamlessly. He and his wife, Professor Edith McGeer, were probably the most productive husband-and-wife team of all time in medical research in Canada. Each received numerous awards and distinctions, including the Order of Canada, Order of British Columbia, and Fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada.

Dr. McGeer received a chemistry doctorate from Princeton, and undergraduate and medical degrees from UBC, eventually finding his calling in his research on Alzheimer's disease. Pat and Edith became world renowned for their work on brain neurotransmitters and mechanisms of neurodegenerative disease. During the 1970's and 80's Pat split his time between the government in Victoria and his lab at UBC. He reflected that he maintained an active lab, even while serving as a minister in the Social Credit government, because he "needed some intellectual stimulation after a day of politics". After his political life he returned full time to UBC, and maintained an active lab even as he reached the age of 85. He also continued to play tennis regularly into his 80's, preferring to play on one of the few grass courts left in the city—in his own backyard. On his lab desk he had a speed dial to check snow conditions at Whistler – lab meetings would apparently be cut short if the ski conditions were really good.

After he left government, he returned to basic research on Alzheimer disease, and essentially established the concept that neuroinflammation plays a role in AD, with a series of seminal works (1-4). He remained frustrated by the subsequent unsuccessful international trials of anti-inflammatory agents in AD, which he felt had drifted away from his preferred drug candidate – Ibuprofen (Advil). He remained committed to Ibuprofen, taking it himself every day to stave off the disease! He remained a force in AD basic research for many years and became active in organizing Alzheimer disease research in BC and across the country. He led our advisory board for applications for a national dementia NCE which preceded the CCNA application in 2013. During the months of setting up the application for CCNA, Pat McGeer regularly provided his advice on how to advance Canadian research and how to structure CCNA. Regarding seeking government support for increased dementia research, he would instruct "You either have to scare the politicians or embarrass them to get them to respond". He never flagged in his enthusiasm about the possibilities of future research, and even his own capacity to make even more important discoveries in the future. He would be thrilled with new scientific insights and was relentless in their pursuit. He had an indomitable spirit and never encountered an obstacle that was too large to deter his course.

Pat McGeer was a great Canadian dementia scientist, a man of unusual talent and a Renaissance man if ever there were one. He was and will continue to be a true inspiration for all who met him and whose lives he enriched. He will certainly be missed.

Dr. Howard Chertkow and Dr. Howard Feldman

## References

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