

Vale Professor Colin Raper (1936-2023)



It is with great sadness that we share the news of the death of Professor Colin Raper, BPharm(Hons), PhD, PhC, MPS. Colin died peacefully in February 2023, surrounded by his beloved family at his home on the scenic Great Ocean Road in Victoria, Australia. Colin was Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, Monash University, the long serving Head of the School of Pharmaceutical Biology (later named the School of Pharmacology) at the Victorian College of Pharmacy (VCP; now known as the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Monash University), as well as being a distinguished pharmacologist who made significant contributions to research, education and mentoring.

Colin graduated with a Pharmacy degree from the School of Pharmacy, University of London ("The Square"; now part of University College London) in 1960 (being named the top student for pharmacology) and was granted a Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain Scholarship to pursue his PhD. Colin undertook his postgraduate research under the supervision of world-renowned pharmacologist, Prof William C. (Bill) Bowman, in 1965 (focussing on skeletal muscle pharmacology), while also being appointed as Assistant Lecturer in Pharmacology. In 1965, he was promoted to Lecturer in the School. Under the leadership of Prof. Gladwyn Buttle, the School of Pharmacy was very productive during this time; the Pharmacology Department at 'The Square' was an academic powerhouse, including not only Bill Bowman, but other luminaries such as Geoff West, Alan Cuthbert, Brian Callingham, Tom Bolton and Mike Rand.

In 1966, Colin moved to Australia to take up a Lectureship in the Department of Pharmacology, University of Melbourne, which was Chaired by Prof. Mike Rand, and was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1968; a position he held for 5 years. During this time, together with Rand and others (including Marian McCulloch, David Story, Bill Lang and Max Fennessy), they quickly built the Department into a national leader in pharmacology research and education. The Department was responsible for teaching pharmacology not only to Science students, but also to Medicine, Dentistry, Optometry and Allied Health Science students. In addition, Colin was involved in postgraduate education in the areas of anaesthesia, surgery, and emergency medicine, amongst others.

In 1973, Colin was appointed as Dean (Pharmacology), Kansas Professor of

Pharmacology and Toxicology, and Head of the School of Pharmaceutical Biology (subsequently the School of Pharmacology), at the VCP (Australia's oldest and most prestigious Pharmacy School); a position that he held until his retirement in 1996, and was responsible for delivery of biology, physiology, biochemistry and pharmacology courses. He was also appointed Dean of the VCP Graduate School in 1980, Deputy Dean of the VCP from 1986 until his retirement, in addition to serving as Acting Dean of the College in 1987-1988. After the amalgamation of the VCP with Monash University, the School of Pharmacology was renamed the Department of Pharmaceutical Biology and Pharmacology.

Colin's primary research interests were in skeletal muscle pharmacology and the development of new muscle relaxants in anaesthesia, but he also published broadly on treatments for asthma, cardiovascular disorders (especially cardiac arrhythmias), and various cholinergic nerve disorders. He authored 125 publications, covering both investigational work and reviews.

Colin also held a long-term interest in toxicology and was appointed to numerous committees and working parties in that field, most notably the Pesticides and Agricultural Standing Committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in Australia, a position that he held from 1971 until 2006. He also served on a number of Australian and Victorian Government Committees, notably the Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission/Accreditation Board Standing Committee, of which he was a member from 1981-1996 and Chairman/Deputy Chairman from 1983-1990.

Colin served as an Editorial Board member of numerous pharmacology journals. He was a member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (now the Royal Pharmaceutical Society), member of the British Pharmacological Society, and a Council member of the Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists and Toxicologists (ASCEPT) from 1973-1984, including the positions of ASCEPT Treasurer and President during that period. From 1984-1987, he was the Program and Publications Editor for the 10th International Congress of Pharmacology (IUPHAR; Sydney, Australia, 1987). He was also a co-author (with Rand and McCulloch) of a popular textbook "An Introduction to the Physiology and Pharmacology of the Autonomic Nervous System". He trained and supervised 24 postgraduate students, as well as being an extremely generous mentor to so many others – many of whom remain close friends to this day in no small part due to their common connection via Colin. He was the recipient of research support from the National Heart Foundation (1968-76) and the NHMRC (1981-1985), in addition to many industry-sponsored research grants.

Colin was a true pioneer, championing the science of Pharmacology, as was well as being highly respected and valued by his colleagues, students and support staff because of his breadth of knowledge, work ethic and unwavering fairness. Indeed, he was loved by all who knew him due to his incredible warmth, approachability, and irreverent sense of humour. He was also an accomplished pianist, and together with his loving partner, Jude, were delightful hosts to multiple generations of family, friends and colleagues. He will be sorely missed, but never forgotten.

Written on behalf of his family, friends and mentees by Arthur Christopoulos, Errol Malta, Jenny Stephenson, Richard Loiacono, Fred Mitchelson and Andrew Raper.