

We have lost a great and much-loved contributor to pharmacology and biomedical sciences at large.

Prof. Geoff Burnstock FRS, AC, was born in London on 10 May 1929 and died in Melbourne on 3 June 2020. He was an outstanding scientist with a strong connection with and love of Australia.

Geoff graduated with a BSc in Zoology from King's College London in 1953 and completed a PhD, also in Zoology, at University College London, in 1957.

"I had the wrong background, the wrong accent, the wrong clothes, but I got into biology at King's College which was the closest thing to medicine. And then I did my PhD at University College London," he said. "I later worked at Oxford and then went to America on a Rockefeller scholarship."

He was appointed to a Senior Lectureship in Zoology at the University of Melbourne in 1959, became reader in 1962 and Professor and Chairman of Zoology in 1964. He left Melbourne to become Head of the Department of Anatomy and Developmental Biology at UCL in 1975, a position he held until retirement in 1996. When Geoff joined, there were 3 professors in the department, when he left, there were 26 of them. Then Geoff moved his team to the Royal Free Hospital, where he was Director of the Autonomic Neuroscience Institute from 1997 to 2015.

In 2015, Geoff returned to the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics at the University of Melbourne, where Geoff remained very active writing papers, travelling, giving lectures, collecting tens of thousands of papers on purinergic transmission and mentoring students and younger colleagues.

Geoff was to an extent an accidental pharmacologist, but threw himself into the field with great energy. He was involved in the discovery of non-adrenergic, non-cholinergic (NANC) neurons in the gut in the 1960's and his research led to the identification of these as purinergic nerves, in spite of strong initial rejection by many well-established senior academics. From this, he developed the purinergic theory and delved deeply into purinergic pharmacology, to the extent that he became first in the Institute of Scientific Information list of most cited scientists in Pharmacology and Toxicology from 1994–2004. Much of our understanding of purinergic signalling and the classification of purinergic receptors derives from Geoff's work, and he is still the most cited Pharmacologist in the world.

Geoff gave the first Von Euler lecture at the Karolinska Institute in 1985, and was the BPS Gaddum Awardee in 2010, amongst many other distinctions. Geoff was made an honorary member of ASCEPT in 1997 and Honorary Fellow of the British Pharmacological Society in 2004. He was made FRS in 1986 and was awarded the Royal Society Gold Medal in 2000. Geoff was elected to the Australian Academy of Science in 1971 and was awarded the Academy's Burnet Medal and Lecture in 2018. Also in 2018, Geoff was appointed a companion of the order of Australia (AC).

Geoff was also actively supporting purinergic research in Industry and Biotech. The first P2X3 antagonist, currently in phase III for the treatment of cough, is named after him: GEFAPIXANT. Geoff will be remembered as a great scientist and person and mentor, as well as an accomplished artist for his beautiful wood carvings.



Reception by the Governor of Victoria to celebrate Geoff's AC in the presence of his wife, Nomi, and family in 2018.



The 1985 Marcus Wallenberg Symposium: Geoff is at the left of the 1st row in company of distinguished speakers and attendees (Courtesy of Tamas Bartfai and Tomas Hokfelt).

Danny Hoyer and John Furness