Tribute to John R. Fozard, Ph.D.

Tributes came in from around the world when the famous and innovative pharmacologist, John Fozard passed away after a long and courageous fight with disease, on September 29, 2018 in Hegenheim, Alsace. John qualified from Bradford then lectured at Manchester, prior to becoming Head of Pharmacology at Merrell Dow Research Centre at Strasbourg, where he led a world class group, finding the first 5-HT_3 antagonists, 5-HT_{1A} modulators, and a WHO essential drug for sleeping sickness, eflornithine. John then joined Sandoz/Novartis in Basel and ran a major group in respiratory disease.

Dozens of now-mature pharmacologists who owe their subsequent successes and careers to John's influences. John's Yorkshire humour and down-to-earth sheer decency were a constant encouragement, while his scientific rigour and organisation were a hurdle which made you jump higher and higher.

John structured great swathes of pharmacology academically, while still discovering drugs which have had a lasting impact. He did much of the work which defined 5-HT1A, 5-HT3, 5-HT4 receptors and the great IUPHAR 5-HT review has been quoted more than 3500 times, the most citations of any receptor review.

His research team in Strasbourg was highly effective, yet all the work was great fun, and also backed up with many parties or barbeques at 'les Fozards'. His ability to create great links with his technicians as well as his scientists was remarkable. Furthermore, all the scientists in his group made a major impact. Pharmacology at Merrell Dow was one of THE addresses in the 1980s, thanks to John's leadership. John was immensely scientifically eclectic. He developed the Merrell Dow drug eflornithine using totally original pharmacology, allowing it to be used for sleeping sickness, where it is a WHO essential drug. The drug was so effective that the clinical trials were difficult to analyse, because patients were brought in from the African bush, on stretchers asleep, then just woke up with the drug and went back into the bush, stopping follow-up! He developed the concept of 5-HT3 antagonists, first for migraine, and later for blocking sickness in cancer chemotherapy patients; now a standard therapy of immense use. We were all involved in this work, and MS remembers interviewing job candidates with an i.v. line in and 5-HT wheals on his arms to test John's (ethically approved!) 5-HT3 antagonist… The 5-HT1A drugs owe much to his pioneering work.

John moved to Sandoz/Novartis, where he headed up a very large research group focussed on discovering improved therapies to treat various cardiovascular diseases launched a highly innovative approach through adenosine receptor modulation which lead to clinical trials of drugs that not only reduced blood pressure, but also corrected metabolic disturbances such as diabetes and obesity which are common in these patients. In 1993, John took charge of the respiratory disease programme at Sandoz which at that time was very much in its infancy and he developed novel concepts for treating asthma and chronic bronchitis which became the cornerstones for a research programme that he led beyond the merger of Sandoz with Ciba-Geigy to form Novartis in 1997. His new Respiratory Research Centre was based in Horsham, south of London, where he built a powerful group that became recognised as the world's most

innovative drug discovery group in respiratory medicine – he was succeeded by John Westwick.

John Fozard was nominated Novartis Distinguished Scientist, the highest accolade for scientists at Novartis and returned to Basel, where in a brilliant series of investigative studies, he demonstrated that activation of sphingosine 1 phosphate receptors was the cause of airways hyperactivity, a cardinal feature of asthma. This has led to a potentially breakthrough approach to treating severe asthma which still causes thousands of deaths each year, particularly in children. These receptors are now one of the main drug targets in immunopharmacology.

In 1990, John had organised the very successful Basel Serotonin meeting, a satellite to IUPHAR 1990, which was so successful that the Serotonin Club was formed with up to 700 members across the world. At this meeting the IUPHAR nomenclature committee for 5-HT receptors was formed leading to the landmark review.

The retirement party for John, in Horsham in 2005, was attended by well over 150 eminent guests from all over the world, colleagues and friends for Academia and Industry, from Novartis, but also from other big Pharma and Biotech, former colleagues and many mentees (figure). John was a fantastic scientist, friend and Mentor. We think very much of his family, wife Christine and children Ruth, Lucy and Stephen.

Michael Spedding, Daniel Hoyer and Brian Richardson.

John Fozard, eighth from left, in dark glasses, surrounded by eminent pharmacologists at his retirement symposium at Horsham.

