

Obituary

Stephen L. Sacks 1948–2003



We dedicate this supplement to our late friend and colleague, Dr. Stephen L. Sacks, Professor of Medicine and Pharmacology, the University of British Columbia, founder of Viridae Sciences and a member of several editorial boards, including *Antiviral Research*. Steve died in November 2003 at the age of 55, after an extended fight with lymphoma. This supplement is based on a Roundtable meeting held in 2003 which was conceived, developed and chaired by Steve.

Steve was a true dual citizen of both the United States and Canada. Born in Akron, Ohio, educated at the University of Pennsylvania (cum Laude), and the University of Cincinnati School of Medicine, he then moved to Canada and spent a year as Chief Medical Resident at Toronto General Hospital. Steve began his research career in infectious diseases

and antiviral therapeutics at Stanford University under the tutelage of Tom Merigan, where he performed some of the earliest work on the use of antivirals for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B. Over the next 25 years of his career, he developed new therapies for persistent viral infections, especially herpesviruses and hepatitis. After his fellowship he joined the faculty at the University of British Columbia, where he rapidly rose through the ranks to become Professor of Medicine and Pharmacology.

Steve's major interest was the diagnosis, pathogenesis, prevention and treatment of herpes simplex virus (HSV) and varicella-zoster virus (VZV) infections. Undoubtedly, Steve will be remembered for his pioneering clinical trials of new therapies for genital herpes, particularly his work on episodic and suppressive antiviral therapy, evaluation of new diagnostics and candidate vaccines, and his fundamental role in the development of famciclovir. Arguably, the famciclovir trials performed by Steve were the basis of licensure by the United States Food and Drug Administration. Indeed, one classic study involved multiple patient evaluations on the same day, providing natural history data that will never ever be repeated. He was rewarded for this work by a superb publication in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Steve was a true clinical virologist, also studying therapies and diagnostics for chronic hepatitis B and human papilloma virus.

His passion for precisely performed clinical research led to his founding of Viridae Sciences—the company that he formed with his wife Marika in 1993. He used Viridae Sciences as a platform for organizing a well-coordinated network of clinical trial sites to define the clinical effectiveness of a wide variety of compounds for HSV and VZV infections. Steve's trademark was to use his vast clinical knowledge of herpes virus infections to carry out studies of direct clinical importance. Indeed, Viridae Sciences, because of Steve's wisdom, was well ahead of its time. To this day, it is the one company that successfully organizes clinical centers for virologic studies, particularly for HSV and VZV diseases.

Steve was far more than a clinical scientist. He was equally recognized as a patient advocate, and while his clinical knowledge of the human herpesviruses was extensive, his real quest was to improve the care of people with genital

herpes, and reduce the stigma associated with this disease. People with herpes will not forget Stephen Sacks. His book *The Truth About Herpes*, written for the lay audience, reflected his passion for improving the care of people stigmatized by this disease. The book, which has been translated and reprinted several times over the past 20 years, has helped thousands of people come to terms with genital herpes, and offers Health Care Providers invaluable advice on clinical management and patient support.

Steve will be remembered for his warmth, wit, drive, energy, inquisitiveness, eloquence and compassion. Steve's energy was perhaps best typified in these last 18 months. Despite a diagnosis of lymphoma and extensive chemotherapy, Steve continued to organize symposia, and plan for

the future. His contributions to the management of genital herpes will have a lasting impact on people for years to come. Marika, his daughter Rebecca, and son Adrian, have lost an integral part of their nuclear family. The international clinical virology community has lost a soul mate.

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