



PROFESSOR PETER ALEXANDER PhD, DSc 1922–1993

It is with a great sense of sorrow that we signal the passing away of an extraordinary member of our editorial community.

Peter Alexander was a significant presence in the early days of Pergamon Press as one of the founders of the journal, *Biochemical Pharmacology*.

He served as a principal editor for the Journal over a period of 36 years and helped nurture it into the flagship publication that it quickly became and continues to be.

His passing is all the more poignant because he seemed so indestructible. As the result of a near fatal skiing accident in January 1989, Peter was rendered a paraplegic but continued to serve actively as the U.K. editor for the Journal and organized several of the prestigious *Biochemical Pharmacology* Symposia.

It was a pleasure to work with Peter. We shall miss his scholarship and wit, and his enthusiasm and charm; but, most of all, we feel diminished by the passing of his indomitable spirit.

Pergamon

It was with great sorrow that we learned of the death of Peter Alexander early on the evening of Tuesday 14th December 1993. Peter, whose life was dedicated to the pursuit of excellent science, was still active right up to the day of his death both as Editor of *Biochemical Pharmacology* and as a Visiting Professor at the University of Southampton, advising a research group on one of his great scientific interests, the possible ways by which growth factors may influence the distribution of metastases in cancer.

Although English through and through, Peter Alexander was born in Munich, Germany on 27th January 1922. Following schooling at University College School in Hampstead, London he moved to the Imperial College of Science, University of London from where he graduated with an Honours Degree in Chemistry in 1941 and a PhD in Physical Chemistry in 1943. During the period 1941–1945, Peter acted as Demonstrator in the Department of Physical Chemistry at Imperial College while learning, under the guidance of Professors H.V.A. Briscoe and

G.I. Finch, the art of research which was to be the backbone of his long and distinguished career. From 1945 until 1950 he worked in the textile industry as a Research Manager but this did not suppress his academic aspirations as, while there, he produced a monograph entitled "*Wool — Its Chemistry and Physics*" which ran to three editions.

In 1950 Peter Alexander joined the Chester Beatty Research Institute and began his work in cancer research which would dominate the rest of his long and illustrious career. In his early days at the Institute, Peter concentrated on the relationships between atomic radiation and cancer. His pioneering work in this period led to the award of the prestigious degree of Doctor of Science. Much of his research into the radiobiology of cancer was published as a major scientific monograph entitled "*Fundamentals of Radiobiology*" in collaboration with the eminent Belgian scientist Zenon Bacq and a digest also appeared as the popular Pelican book "*Atomic Radiations and Life*". In 1963 he was appointed Head of the Radiobiology Department at the Chester Beatty Research Institute and in 1965 and 1967 earned the honorary appointments of Reader and then Professor of Radiobiology of the University of London. Peter Alexander was not one to rest on his laurels however and during this time developed an all-consuming interest in the immunology of cancer, an interest which led to his appointment in 1967 as Director of the Division of Tumour Immunology at the Chester Beatty Research Institute and a strong link with Dr Gordon Hamilton-Fairley. This led to a unique blend of basic and clinical science which continued long after Dr Hamilton-Fairley's assassination by an IRA bomb.

With the changing face of cancer research in the 1980s, Peter Alexander took early retirement from the Chester Beatty Research Institute in 1982 to join the CRC Medical Oncology Group at the University of Southampton in order to follow his latest interest, the role of growth factors in tumour metastasis. Here he established a small, but productive, research group with which he worked on a full-time basis until his horrifying skiing accident in January 1989 which left him confined to a wheelchair with only partial use of his hands and arms. However, his brain was not affected nor his enthusiasm blunted and every Wednesday he demanded to be driven the 200 mile round trip from his retirement home in Devon to the Southampton laboratory for a full day of project discussions.

Peter Alexander was primarily an organiser, a teacher, a communicator and an "ideas man". The last two of these came to the forefront late in 1957 when he approached the publisher Robert Maxwell with a proposal that the rapidly expanding Pergamon Press should publish a journal dedicated to reporting studies on the mode of action of drugs at the subcellular and biochemical levels. This idea was accepted by Mr Maxwell with enthusiasm. Thus, under the editorial leadership of Sir Alexander Haddow, Sir Rudolph Peters and Zenon Bacq (who were linked by their work on the biological effects of nerve gases), and Peter Alexander, *Biochemical Pharmacology* was launched in July 1958. For the next 36 years Peter Alexander was to remain a principal editor of *Biochemical Pharmacology* being appointed Executive Editor in 1985 and being elected as Chairman of the Board of Editors in July 1993 in recognition of his services to the journal. In addition he instigated the prestigious bi-annual *Biochemical Pharmacology* Symposia which brings together eminent scientists from diverse disciplines for two days intense deliberations, the results of which are published in a special issue of the journal.

During his career Peter Alexander published over 300 scientific papers, was a member of the Editorial Advisory Boards of 12 journals and served on many national and international committees holding executive positions in several. These included Presidency of the British Association of Cancer Research, Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Marie Curie Memorial Foundation, Committee of Management of the Institute of Cancer Research, member of the Awards Committee of the General Motors Cancer Research Foundation, Consultant to the British Delegation to the United Nations Scientific Committee on Atomic Radiation and numerous study groups of the International Atomic Energy Agency and World Health Organisation. In addition, Peter was elected to membership of the Belgian Academy of medical

Sciences and the German Academy of Science "Leopoldina" and was awarded the gold Medal of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1970.

To those who knew him personally Peter Alexander was an inspiration, a leader and a teacher with a particular interest in young scientists whom he failed to believe may not share his total fascination for science. He could not stop organising people even when he went home, as illustrated by the comment to his wife June on her birthday: "Today is your birthday darling, you can do anything you wish. However, I would suggest that you do . . .". Another aspect of his character, his singlemindedness and total failure to be deflected by even the most dramatic circumstances is illustrated by the hill walking (to Peter, mountain climbing to anyone else!) holiday to the Lake District he undertook with his son-in-law Anthony. Nearing the end of their journey lost and late as usual, they were overtaken by a fast car which they soon afterwards found had crashed and turned upside down in a ditch around the next bend. Anthony insisted on going to offer his help to the victim at the accident scene. Peter, somewhat exasperated blurted "We can't stop, we're already late! Oh! If you insist. I suppose you're right. But don't forget to ask him if we're on the right road to Brough". Oh Peter we will miss you. The memory of your devotion to science and your constant efforts to pursue it both through experimentation and through publication will be an inspiration to us all. Also you will be sorely missed by your devoted wife June and your children Maxine, Leone and Adam to whom you also gave so much.

The Editors
Biochemical Pharmacology