

In Memoriam

Jan J. Opplt
1921–2000

JAN J. OPPLT, MD, PhD, died unexpectedly on September 3, 2000. His professional career coincided with the era of rapid advances in our understanding of lipoproteins and their role in the development of atherosclerosis, and his contributions in this field were numerous.

Dr. Opplt completed his scientific and medical education at Charles University in Prague, where his last achievement was a Scientific-Educational Degree (Docent) in 1969. As a medical student and during his studies for a PhD in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he became interested in serum proteins and, in particular, lipoproteins. This interest led to a Fellowship in the ultracentrifugation laboratories of Professors Tiselius and Svedberg in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1959. This early experience was a catalyst for Dr. Opplt's continued research and his evolving understanding of the physicochemical properties of lipoproteins in a variety of diseases.

In parallel with his expanding interest in lipoproteins in health and disease states, he was intimately involved in developing the field of clinical chemistry. He was the Chairman of the Department of Clinical Chemistry at Charles University from 1951 to 1969. In 1971 he became the Director of Clinical Chemistry at Metropolitan General Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio, and in 1973 he was appointed as Associate Professor of Pathology at Case Western Reserve University. He cofounded the Clinical Chemistry Program at Cleveland State University, and soon his clinical laboratories became the principal training sites for future clinical chemists. For more than a decade he provided an outstanding elective course in clinical pathology for students at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine.

Dr. Opplt's many contributions to the field of lipoprotein research are witnessed by more than 100 scientific

publications and co-authorship of four textbooks. His studies led to a number of advances, including the introduction of photometric scanning to the analyses of proteinograms (1954) and lipoproteinograms (1956); the introduction of permanent standards for electrophoretic analyses; and the isolation and characterization of the physicochemical properties of both medium density and very high density lipoproteins. During the 1980s he continued his studies of lipoprotein structure and identified conformational changes that occur within lipoprotein classes in association with pharmacological therapies. Over the past two decades his focus was on the development and clinical application of a unique method for the isolation of lipoproteins on the basis of their molecular sizes. This technique of molecular-phoresis allowed a rapid and convenient approach to the quantification of all lipoprotein classes and subclasses from small serum samples.

Dr. Opplt returned to his native Prague and in 1996 founded the Institute for the Early Diagnosis of Atherosclerosis. Here he was able to apply the molecular-phoresis approach to the characterization of lipoproteins in large populations. Because the technique had been refined to such a degree that even tiny blood samples could undergo a full lipoprotein analysis, he had begun a study of inherited lipoprotein abnormalities in newborns in the year before his untimely death.

Dr. Opplt's career spanned four decades in which he devoted his expertise to advances in lipoprotein research, clinical chemistry, and the teaching of future physicians and clinical chemists.

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