

Obituary

John Tallman, 1947–2006

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Dr John Tallman, aged 59 years, died suddenly at his home in Quogue, NY on 8 March 2006. This kind person of great wit and intellect will be profoundly missed by his many friends and colleagues.

John received his undergraduate degree and doctorate in biochemistry from Georgetown University in 1972 and rapidly gained preeminence in the field for his work on Tay-Sachs Disease in the laboratory of Roscoe O Brady at the NINCDS. Mentored in neuropharmacological research by Dr Julius Axelrod at the NIMH, Dr Tallman went on to become Chief of the Section on Biochemistry and Pharmacology in the Biological Psychiatry Branch of the NIMH. During this period, John focused his attentions on the role of neurotransmitter receptors in psychiatric disorders and treatments. In 1978, John and his longtime colleague, Dr Dorothy Gallager, elucidated the modulatory role of benzodiazepines on the GABA neurotransmitter system.

Over the next 15 years, Dr Tallman continued his pioneering work investigating properties of the GABA_A neurotransmitter receptor using pharmacological and molecular biological probes.

In 1982, John joined the faculty in the Department of Psychiatry (and Pharmacology) at Yale University School of Medicine where he continued his molecular characterization of GABA_A neurotransmitter receptors. He was instrumental in establishing the Division of Molecular Psychiatry within the Department of Psychiatry at Yale, and his students and fellows have gone on to important leadership positions throughout the country.

Dr Tallman left Yale in 1988 to found and become Scientific Director of Neurogen Corporation, in order to apply molecular biology and nanochemistry to designing novel drugs for neuropsychopharmacology. Under his direction, the company grew to approximately 150 staff scientists and introduced 10 drug candidates into human clinical development. In 2001, John became president and CEO of Helicon Therapeutics Inc., a biotech company with a focus on functional genomics of memory and therapeutics to enhance memory consolidation. In all of his professional endeavors, John devoted his intellect and energies towards turning basic scientific breakthroughs into practical psychotherapeutics.

Dr Tallman was active in many basic neuroscience and psychiatric research organizations, including the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, the Collegium Internationale Neuropsychopharmacologicum, American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics and the Society for Neuroscience. Throughout his distinguished career, he served on many editorial boards and national advisory groups and presented at international academic symposia. Dr Tallman mentored many basic and clinical researchers who were inspired to pursue basic/clinical research at neuropsychiatric institutions throughout the world.

John was a true renaissance man who enjoyed travel, music, literature, the arts and gourmet cooking. He was generous with his expertise and a true friend to all who knew him. He is survived by Kathleen Person, his wife of 35 years.

Dorothy Gallager and George Heninger
Columbus, MT, USA