

Obituary

Albert Kurland

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Dr Albert Kurland was still working on a research book when he succumbed to cardiac failure at the age of 94 on December 7, 2008. He was the founder of the Maryland State Psychiatric Research Center and an eternal optimist, who worked energetically and never said an unkind word about anyone.

Dr Kurland was born in Pennsylvania to European immigrants, but was sent to Baltimore to live with his relatives and graduated from the City College in 1932 before completing University of Maryland Medical School in 1940. He served first as an intern at Sinai Hospital, when it was downtown Baltimore, before he became an assistant battalion surgeon and captain in the army under General George Patton. He received the Legion of Merit award for his bravery and for selflessly saving the lives of many fallen soldiers, humbly giving credit for much of his own work to the new antibiotic, sulfanilamide.

In 1946 Dr Kurland came to Spring Grove State Hospital to complete his psychiatric residency and soon after became its director of research. Through his tireless interest in improving treatments for his patients, he established and became the first director of the Maryland State Psychiatric Research Center in 1970. This unique facility was equipped early on to attract and retain talented doctors with a wide range of interests in psychological and psychiatric treatments, including a dolphin pool that was never used as intended. Early on Dr Kurland recognized and promoted major advancements in the care of the mentally ill, including supporting the use of thorazine in 1954, soon

after its introduction. He was not afraid of tackling controversial subjects, approaching them with great care. Until his death he felt that LSD in carefully controlled circumstances could have positive benefits for therapy for those who had failed other treatments and who still suffered from substance abuse. At the time of his death he was working on the book *LSD: An Investigational Odyssey*, chronicling his own experimental work from 1963 to 1976 as well as the efforts of others.

He remained the guiding light of the research center, inspiring a whole generation of researchers there, until he accepted a position at Taylor Manor Hospital in 1980 to continue clinical and research work. At Taylor Manor, together with Dr Bruce Taylor, he worked with several new antidepressants, but most notably, demonstrated the first safety and efficacy data and sleep EEG studies of depressed adolescents with Wellbutrin before it came to market. He was an important voice of reason in helping convince Burroughs Wellcome not to abandon this new drug in the face of concerns about seizures in depressed anorexics, and went on to assist in further safety and efficacy studies of this important drug after it was first withdrawn so that it could later return to the market.

Although Dr Kurland retired in 2002, he continued to work on his research while enjoying a bit more time at concerts with his wife Hanna, and family life with his children Michael Kurland and Marilyn Rosenstein, as well as his seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He loved his work and research as well as almost everyone he met, always seeing and bringing out the best in whomever he contacted as a doctor or as a friend.

Bruce T Taylor