



December 4, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

With deep sorrow, we announce the passing of Professor Richard Alan Lerner of The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI), who died yesterday in La Jolla, California. He is best known for pioneering the field of catalytic antibodies. Lerner served as the first President of TSRI (1991-2012). He was well recognized by Israel's scientific community as reflected by winning the Wolf Prize in Chemistry (1994/5, with Peter Schultz) "for converting antibodies into enzymes." He became an Honorary Doctor of the Technion (2001) and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (2003).

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**Prof. Richard A. Lerner (1938 – 2021)**

Richard A. Lerner was born on August 26, 1938, grew up in South Chicago, and attended Hirsch High School. After attending Northwestern University as an undergraduate, Lerner obtained an M.D. from Stanford Medical School (1964) then became a postdoc at Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation, an early incarnation of TSRI. Following a research work at the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia, he returned to the Research Institute of Scripps Clinic in La Jolla. In 1982 he became Chairman of the Department of Molecular Biology, then five years later assumed the directorship. In 1991 he founded TSRI as a nonprofit entity and became its first president. Under Lerner's leadership, TSRI grew threefold in lab space and more than quadrupled its staff, making it among the largest nonprofit biomedical research organizations in the world. He attracted highly innovative and creative chemists and biologists to TSRI, launched its graduate school, and established a sister research campus, Scripps Florida, in Palm Beach County. In parallel, he recruited and nurtured outstanding coworkers to his research group, who later became scientific leaders worldwide. The 2021 Nobel laureate in chemistry Benjamin List started as Lerner's postdoc.

Lerner's most celebrated research is catalytic antibodies, providing a method of catalyzing chemical reactions thought impossible using classical techniques. He has also developed synthetic peptide vaccines, combinatorial antibody libraries, and DNA-encoded chemical libraries. His group's discoveries led to novel therapeutics, including Humira (sold for \$20 billion in 2020) and Benlysta. He published over 450 scientific papers, 70 patents and founded multiple startup companies. Lerner was the Lita Annenberg Hazen Professor of Immunochemistry and Cecil H. and Ida M. Green Chair in Chemistry. In addition to the abovementioned, his long list of honors and prizes includes the 1978 Parke-Davis Award, the 1990 San Marino Award, the 1996 California Scientist of the Year Award, and the 2002 University of California Presidential Medal. He was a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (1991). He received honorary degrees from Warwick, Florida Atlantic University, and the University of Oxford. In 2012 Lerner shared the Prince of Asturias Award (often called the Spanish Nobel Prize) with Sir Gregory Winter for developing combinatorial antibody libraries. Lerner married Nicola Green Lerner, a physician, in 1981. He had three children by a previous marriage to Diana Pickett, a psychotherapist.

I take the liberty to add personal comments as Richard was my good friend and a role model for more than three decades. The term impossible was not part of his vocabulary. I've learned from him that there is no limit to imagination and creativity, no limit to the number of assignments one person can fulfill, and no limit to the magnitude of a dream one can turn into reality. Richard was blessed with the unique ability to quickly decipher the essence of people's thoughts and their most hidden personal character, thus focusing on what he defined as the most valuable projects and people. His entrepreneurial spirit was comparable with Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates. I've experienced with him the joy of scientific discovery, the silent mode of human communication, the power of commitment and dedication, and the wildest sense of humor.

The ICS and the global chemistry community mourn the loss of a great scientist.

*Ehud Keinan*