

Obituary

Claude de Montigny, M.D., Ph.D.



On October 19, 2012, our Field lost a brilliant mind. Claude de Montigny passed away peacefully during his sleep in his family home in Outremont, Québec. Claude was only 67 years old. The unexpected news that friends and close colleagues received the very next day threw an intense wave of sadness in our hearts.

Claude graduated in Medicine from the Université de Montréal and underwent training first in Neurology before switching to Psychiatry. When most residents anticipated with some degree of fear the written portion of the exam from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, Dr de Montigny actually passed the test earlier than expected in the training program. He started his research career in the early 1970's with Dr Yves Lamarre focusing his work on olivo-cerebello-bulbar system using electrophysiological techniques and obtained a PhD in the Neurological Sciences at the Department of Physiology of the Université de Montréal. Given that his interest had shifted from Neurology to Psychiatry, he became

fascinated by the work of Dr George Aghajanian at Yale University and joined his laboratory in 1976. Claude's first paper with George was published in 1978 in Science. They described that long-term but not short-term administration of tricyclic antidepressants, independently of their action on serotonin or norepinephrine reuptake, sensitized postsynaptic serotonin receptors in two rat forebrain regions. This publication was truly the catalyst for Claude's illustrious career.

He returned to Montréal in 1977 to start his own laboratory. Claude was spending three days a week in the laboratory and the other two days were dedicated to setting up a clinical research unit at Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine hospital across town. He built both his basic research and clinical programs on the Science paper. Claude had a unique capacity to synthesize and link clinical phenomena with basic research findings. In the area of the antidepressant response for example, he solidified his earlier findings using tricyclics reporting similar results using repeated electroconvulsive shocks. Applying his superior translational skills to trying to improve the antidepressant response, he thought of adding lithium to the tricyclic regimen of treatment-resistant patients due to the capacity of lithium to enhance serotonin release. He thought releasing more serotonin on already sensitized postsynaptic receptors could produce a clinical response. It did. His first paper was published in 1981 and lithium augmentation is still used nowadays. In the area of anxiety disorders, Claude first reported in Nature in 1984 that the excitation of hippocampus neurons produced by local application of cholecystokinin was blocked by benzodiazepines. He went on to demonstrate this in humans. This led to the

use of intravenous cholecystikinin as a model in humans for panic attacks.

Claude was the perfect example of clinician scientist always devising basic research experiments with clinical implications in mind and setting up clinical studies based on neurobiological findings. In 1987, he relocated to McGill University where he had the opportunity of conducting basic research and clinical studies, as well as specialty consultations in mood disorders at the Allan Memorial Institute. His publications and achievements multiplied over the years. He received in 1995 the prestigious prize Selo from NARSAD in recognition of outstanding accomplishments.

Claude was president of the CINP between 1996 and 1998 and this was an enormous task dear to his heart. He is responsible for establishing a journal for the association and put his confidence in the outstanding skills of his friend and colleague Bernard Lerer to lead this effort as the first chief editor. To this day, the journal is thriving and is contributing to giving greater visibility to the organization.

Claude was accepted into the ACNP as a member in 1985 and made an emeritus member in 2011. He was promoted to professor emeritus at McGill University shortly before his untimely death.

It was a true pleasure doing research with Claude and many basic research trainees and psychiatric residents sought training under his guidance. I had the privilege of being his first graduate student in 1978 and returned to work with him after completion of my training in 1987. He shared valuable times with members of his team through the years, whether they were around jovial and at times copious lunches in the research unit or in scientific meetings. Precious times

were spent on ski hills when attending winter brain conferences, Claude loved downhill skiing. He also cherished spending time at his lakeside vacation home in the Laurentians, north of Montreal.

Claude was extremely proud of his family. He is leaving behind his wife Monique whom many of us had the pleasure of meeting at the ACNP meetings that he never missed during his active career. His older daughter Violaine is a veterinarian and Catherine is a physician. Claude had three grand children, Julien, Laurence, and Philibert. He spent most of the last conversation we had in 2011 telling me how happy he was to spend time with all his family members. Claude will be sorely missed and those of us who had the pleasure of knowing him will never forget the good times we had together.

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