

Obituary

Jonathan O. Cole, (1925-2009)



Jonathan Cole was a unique personality, a creative clinical scientist, the consummate visionary. He entered the psychiatric scene at the time psychotropic drugs, a revolutionary development in the treatment of mental disorder, were discovered. The National Academy of Sciences and the NIMH recruited him with eminent neurophysiologist Ralph Gerard to organize a national conference on the new science of psychopharmacology. Prestigious psychiatrists, pharmacologists, psychologists, and neurochemists conferred on structuring the new science, initiating a major effort by the National Institutes of Health to build on these discoveries. The conference volume, "Psychopharmacology: Problems in Evaluation" had world-wide impact, setting the stage for radical changes in the science of mental disorders.

Congress appropriated \$2 million for the program. Robert Felix, Director, National Institute of Mental Health, recruited Jonathan to lead. He convened an interdisciplinary advisory committee. Then, mounted a national collaborative evaluation of the efficacy of the new drugs, while concurrently initiating a major research grants effort to investigate their basic mechanisms. It was a grand mission for a young psychiatrist. The results proved that the NIH selected the right man. In a decade as head of the NIMH Psychopharmacology Service Center, Jonathan assembled an interdisciplinary staff to accomplish the Congress' mission. Evaluating psychiatric treatments in 1956 was still relatively primitive. In that climate Jonathan led the first controlled, multihospital collaborative double-blind evaluation of phenothiazines in the treatment of acute schizophrenia. That project provided a prototype, a model for subsequent NIMH collaborative evaluations of the new classes of drugs: lithium as a treatment for mania, tricyclic

antidepressants for depression and the benzodiazepines for anxiety disorders. For that landmark study, Jonathan's group received psychiatry's Hofheimer award, their most prestigious for scientific accomplishment.

Jonathan was also aware that the new drugs had been discovered, not in a controlled basic laboratory, but even earlier by the "green-thumb" psychiatrists. They, long on experience, could by observing few patients discern a new drug as "remarkable" in its effects, warranting further evaluation. This creative insight led to, the "early clinical drug evaluation" program, support for astute clinicians in their search for new psychoactive compounds. The program was so successful its spirit remains in effect. The group meets annually as the NCDEU, still partially supported by the NIMH.

Jonathan excelled at monitoring support of basic research and the provision of adequate funds for developmental studies of drug mechanisms. Little known today is that the NIMH's program for research on substance abuse also started within his Psychopharmacology Service Center. Young psychiatrists he trained would help expand this field until it became an Institute in itself.

In 1967 Jonathan followed notable figures in psychiatry to become Superintendent, Boston State Hospital, then to direct psychopharmacology at Harvard and McLean Hospital, and to guide young clinical investigators. Co-author of several textbooks, he founded the Psychopharmacology Bulletin. A member of several important NIMH committees, we viewed him as a "model clinical science administrator" and relied on his guidance in dealing with the complexities of interdisciplinary research in psychiatry.

Jonathan, a founder and early ACNP president, received their first Paul Hoch Distinguished Service Award. As CINP secretary, 1965-1969, his contributions were recognized with the coveted Pioneers in Psychopharmacology award. Of most consequence, however, for the creation of the discipline of psychopharmacology was the combining of Congress' foresight in appropriating \$2 million and the sagacious appointment of this young, creative psychiatrist to lead its initial development. Jonathan Cole truly was a pioneer, distinguished by his capacity to reach out to people, to innovate, to spark the US program off to a broad ranged and exciting start.

No award, however, satisfied Jon as much as his colleagues' appreciation of his forthrightness his integrity and his capacity to tell the truth as he saw it. Many credited him with their later successes. His typical response to compliments, was a sincere show of surprise. Jonathan leaves a lasting impression, masterly shining a creative light onto our paths into the future.

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