

NEWS IN NEUROVIROLOGY

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A Message from the President

By Walter Royal, III

Diane Griffin, MD, PhD, a pioneering infectious-disease virologist, scientific leader, and Johns Hopkins professor, passed away in October.

A long-standing member of ISNV and recipient of the Pioneer in Neurovirology award in 2009, Dr. Griffin was chair emeritus of the W. Harry Feinstone Department of Molecular Microbiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

A world-renowned expert on alphaviruses, acute encephalitis, measles, HIV, and malaria, Dr. Griffin was one of the most prominent scientific leaders of her generation. Her contributions to the field include demonstrating that measles virus infection causes death primarily by increasing susceptibility to other infections. She also showed that the measles virus leaves RNA particles for months after apparent recovery—which may contribute to the lifelong protective immunity from measles. Her work has been cited more than 24,700 times.

In this issue:

In Memoriam:

Diane Griffin, MD, PhD



After earning an MD in 1968, she completed her residency in internal medicine at Stanford University Hospital while finishing her doctorate. She joined John Hopkins Medicine, along with her husband, in 1970 and became full professor in 1985.

Bill Tyor, MD, a member of ISNV, recalls his time working with Dr. Griffin, “As a postdoctoral fellow in Diane’s lab at Hopkins from 1986 to 1988, I especially enjoyed and appreciated several qualities. After an initial period of close interaction, I was allowed to largely operate on my own since I already had quite a bit of basic laboratory experience at that point. However, that did not mean that Diane was not available for long and detailed discussions about data interpretation and writing manuscripts. These were invaluable sessions. I would add that her breadth of knowledge about infectious diseases and immunology was inspiring. And importantly, she was good person”.

(continued on page 2)

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Continued from page 1

In 1994, the Bloomberg School appointed Dr. Griffin chair of what was then the Department of Immunology and Infectious Disease. She renamed the department Molecular Microbiology and Immunology to reflect the growing importance of molecular biology across the basic science spectrum. She served as department chair from 1994 to 2014, was named a University Distinguished Service Professor in 2010, and was inducted into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 2009.

"I remember Diane with great fondness. While her professional accomplishments were many, and her passing leaves a large void in the scientific community, I also got to know her well at a personal level. When I first joined Johns Hopkins University as a faculty member in the Department of Neurology twenty-four years ago, she and Jack welcomed me and my family at their home. She was warm, compassionate and took an active interest in the getting to know the kids and following their careers over the years. We participated in several committees together and I served on her graduate students' thesis committees. In these interactions I benefited greatly from her expertise and wisdom. She was not only rigorous in her scientific pursuit but was also not afraid to challenge scientific dogma. On a few occasions, I witnessed how she openly welcomed debate and discussion on ideas that may not have aligned with her own. Even after I left Hopkins we remained in close touch. We met regularly at social gatherings each summer and winter and at some professional meetings. Each year she sent us a Holiday greeting card with a detailed account of her extended family and all her travels. She loved travelling professionally and with family and friends. This included Alaska and the remotest parts of Africa. In recent years, as the Vice President of the National Academy of Sciences, she took on several roles of public health importance including the complications of COVID. In her role as an editor for PNAS, she had asked me to serve as a guest editor on several occasions. Little did I know that my recent correspondence with her in this capacity would be the last. I have lost a mentor, colleague, and friend. But her memories, teachings, scientific advancements and warmth will live on forever," said Avi Nath, MD, member of ISNV.

On behalf of the ISNV community, I would like to extend our sincere condolences to the Griffin family and colleagues from Johns Hopkins.

Walter Royal, III, MD
President, ISNV

