

Andrei E. Medvedev – In Memoriam

Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die...” The untimely and premature death of our dear friend and colleague, Andrei E. Medvedev, should be a wake-up call to all of us that we should strive in our lives to be generous to others, to do our best, and to live each day as though it were our last. Andrei was in Moscow, visiting his aging mother whom he had not seen in many years when he passed away suddenly.

Andrei obtained his Ph.D. in Moscow and accepted a post-doctoral position in the laboratory of Dr. Terje Espevik (Trondheim, Norway) where he studied TNF signaling. In 1996, he sent me an email asking if he could do a second post-doc in my lab. Based on his prior work in the Espevik lab, and his excellent written communication skills, I offered him a position at Uniformed Services University (USUHS) without an interview. He arrived in the USA with his family and almost immediately started working on molecular aspects of LPS signaling. It should be noted that he was working on this a full two years before Toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) was identified as the “LPS receptor,” and he used his skills to delve into mechanisms underlying “endotoxin tolerance,” a state of LPS hyporesponsiveness that develops after a primary exposure to lipopolysaccharide (LPS) and other microbial products. It was his work showing that LPS and IL-1-mediated signaling leading to proinflammatory gene expression was curtailed in macrophages rendered “tolerant” to LPS that convinced Dr. John Gallin, Director of NIAID and the Clinical Center of the NIH, to allow us to analyze the leukocytes of his patient, a child who presented with an unexplained history of recurrent bacterial infections and whose white cells were LPS- and IL-1-hyporesponsive. Led by Andrei, our laboratory ultimately determined, 6 years later, that this patient had a primary immunodeficiency caused by mutations in a gene that encodes a critical kinase required for TLR4 signaling. It was also during this time that Andrei convinced me to hire another post-doctoral fellow trained in Moscow, Vladimir Toshchakov.

A major factor in my decision to move to UMSOM in 2002 was that Andrei was willing to move with me to continue our work, despite the fact that he was commuting from Rockville. As an Assistant Professor, non-tenure track, he soon obtained his first NIH R01 to study endotoxin tolerance. Dr. Jan Cerny, our Chairman at the time, rewarded Andrei with his own office and laboratory where he began his career as an independent researcher and teacher and he rose through the ranks to become Associate Professor, tenure track, after Dr. James Kaper became Chair. Andrei published his work in highly ranked peer-reviewed journals including, but not limited to, *The Journal of Immunology*, *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, *Journal of Experimental Medicine*, and soon became internationally recognized for his work. While he clearly established his own research path, we continued to be close colleagues and were collaborating on a new project when he passed away. In 2013, he accepted a faculty position at University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC) where he continued his research and teaching. He collaborated with scientists at many other institutions and he soon became an integral part of the UCHC family as he did at UMSOM.

Anyone who knew Andrei knew that he was an extraordinarily careful scientist who defined “rigor and reproducibility.” As one of our former graduate students, Quan Nhu, said to me, “Andrei was a man of few words, but a man of action, a man of integrity, and a genuine person.” He constantly sought to connect the dots and did so with a passion and drive that was admirable. During the past few years, he struggled with funding (like many of us), but his persistence kept his laboratory afloat and he had just recently heard that he was going to be awarded a new R01 grant to study mechanisms by which autoimmune disease was regulated by TLR signaling. Most importantly, Andrei was a wonderful family man. He loved and was very proud of his wife, Svetlana, and their two children, Anton and Anastasia, who were very young when they initially moved to the USA. He had in his office many pictures of his children and would delight in telling you about what each was doing. He loved camping with his kids, and often returned to Assateague Island.

I have many wonderful recollections of my interactions with Andrei. For example, when we were working on his first R01, he seemed shocked when I told him that he wrote like a Russian (think “War and Peace”) – he wasn’t exactly amused by this, but took it to heart, and worked at making his grant less dense. “Medvedev” means “bear” in Russian. When Andrei left UMSOM, I told him that he was really a Teddy Bear and was repaid with a huge bear hug. I think we all share a sentiment expressed by Andrei’s former co-worker, Prasad Rallabhandi, “May his soul rest in peace.”

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