Marcos Tsacopoulos, MD, PhD

1939–2002

Our beloved friend and colleague Marcos Tsacopoulos, MD, PhD, a pioneer in neuroimmunomodulation, died after a brief struggle with a malignant disease. Three years ago, Prof. Tsacopoulos took the Chair of Experimental Physiology at the Medical School of the National University of Athens. The long experience that he had acquired from many major academic centers around the world, his international recognition for his research, and, more importantly, his sincere desire to transfer his knowledge and experience to young scientists, were the best assets for the improvement of the basic sciences in the Medical School of the National University of Athens.

Born in Athens in 1939, Prof. Tsacopoulos graduated from the Medical School of the National University of Athens in 1964. Soon after, he moved to Switzerland to advance his medical knowledge. He was trained in Clinical Ophthalmology at the University Hospital of Geneva. His postgraduate experience was obtained in the USA, Germany and France. He taught physiology for 23 years at the Universities of Geneva and Athens. His particular research field was in the neurosciences. One of his main contributions were to measure the kinetics of oxygen consumption in single cells with a new method he established which showed that the triggering of metabolism was due to the rapid action of calcium in the mitochondria [Nature 1977;301:604–606; Nature 1988;331:437–440]. With microelectrodes he devised, he was the first to study the intracellular concentration of K^+ in neurons and neuroglia during nerve stimulation [J Physiol 1977;270:12–14]. He also revealed the mechanisms of interaction and metabolic coupling between glial cells and neurons [J Neurosci 1996;16:877–885; J Neurosci 2000;20:1809–

1821]. He was the first to prove that astroglia is the main source of energy for neurons [Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 1988;85:8727–8731]. The importance of this highly original research for both basic and clinical science became recognized only recently, as animal models and human modern imaging studies revealed the major role of neuroglia in degenerative brain disorders, such as Alzheimers' disease, or affective disorders, such as major depression. Among the experimental models he developed, the mini pig-model [Exp Eye Res 1975;20:23–32] has found worldwide applications.

Immediately after his election as the Chair of Experimental Physiology, without waiting for administrative formalities, he started working for endless hours in the Department. The transformation of the laboratory soon

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became apparent. Despite the local administrative difficulties, he donated all his contemporary research instruments from Geneva and started attracting senior and young colleagues to join him in his efforts to promote neurophysiology.

However, all this joy and hope he produced did not last long. Many times, fate plays terrible games. A fatal disease struck him. His desire to perform research, to transfer and promote knowledge made him ignore the illness. He had difficult and painful hospitalizations, but immediately after discharge he was back in the laboratory to work,

teach and inspire young colleagues, and with his honest, straight and smooth personality to balance internal laboratory difficulties. His concern for the medical students was evident by the fact that between hospitalizations he produced an excellent, highly didactic and utterly modern book on human physiology. His short but intense passage from the Athens University Medical School was exemplary. This is what we should remember. He will be sorely missed.

H.M. Moutsopoulos
Athens, August 19, 2002