Andrei Sulica, MD, 1938–2000

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Andrei Sulica was one of Romania's preeminent immunologists, with expertise in immunochemistry and immunobiology. His recent death from metastatic renal cell carcinoma is a major loss for the field of natural immunity. Andrei was at the center of a long-standing research program to understand the interactions of natural killer (NK) cells and macrophages with cytophilic, monomeric immunoglobulins, especially IgG. In a very productive and close collaboration with me and my colleagues, he demonstrated that such interactions are the result of binding to Fc receptors on the effector cells and that, in contrast to the usual stimulation of functional activity when FcγRIIIA is engaged in NK cells, monomeric IgG leads to potent inhibition of cytotoxic activity. In recent years, his strong curiosity and innovative thinking led to the identification and molecular characterization of a new class of FcγR on human NK cells, FcγRIIC, and to considerable evidence for cross-talk between the well-known FcγRIIIA and FcγRIIC. Although this body of research has only slowly reached international recognition, it has been amply confirmed by other investigators and is likely to play an important role in understanding of the

regulation of the functional activities of NK cells and other natural effector cells.

Although Andrei spent most of his life in the repressive atmosphere of communist-controlled Romania, his remarkable energy and political skills led him to be able to make and maintain strong contacts with immunologists in other countries. Several years after his medical training, he managed to get permission to attend a WHO International Course in Human Allotypes in France, and shortly thereafter, to receive a position as a Visiting Scientist in the laboratory of Dr. Michael Sela, President of the Weizmann Institute of Sciences in Rehovot, Israel. These experiences opened his eyes to the exciting world of innovative and rapidly evolving immunochemistry, and led to strong scientific and personal interactions that endured for the rest of his life. The usual anticommunist and creative scientist, once beyond the grasp of a totalitarian regime, would have remained in Israel or managed to immigrate to the USA. However, Andrei had a very strong sense of being a Romanian and was convinced that it was essential for leading intellectuals to remain and fight for progress from within. He therefore returned with his family to Bucha-

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rest and, within 10 years, became Head of the Department of Immunology at the Babes Institute, the leading center for immunochemistry and immunopathology in Romania.

His national loyalty was recognized by the government and he was allowed to come to the USA in the late 1970s as a member of a delegation to the Fogarty Center of the National Institutes of Health, where I first met him. I was immediately taken by his intellect and enthusiasm and we quickly entered into a long-standing and close collaboration and friendship. With only modest support provided to Andrei and his very dedicated colleagues, consisting mainly of some essential reagents and laboratory equipment, it was possible for them to make impressive contributions to our collaborative elucidation of the interactions of monomeric immunoglobulins with human NK cells.

After the fall of the communist regime in Romania, Andrei was increasingly called upon to provide scientific leadership in his country. He was elected to membership in the Romanian Academy of Medical Sciences, was

made Director of a newly established center of immunology in Bucharest and played a major role in developing a peer review grants process for Romanian biomedical research, patterned after the US National Institutes of Health.

Eight years ago, Andrei's scientific and academic activities began to be increasingly interfered with by serious health problems. He developed renal cell carcinoma, first in one kidney and then in the other, resulting in bilateral nephrectomies and complete dependence on hemodialysis. Even after he had developed pulmonary metastases, he never stopped fighting. He was extremely determined to obtain treatment with a series of biological therapies, which kept his tumor in check for a prolonged period and allowed him to continue his active research program. Unfortunately, these battles took a major toll on him and he finally died for an apparent heart attack. The field of natural immunity has lost a major contributor, and his many colleagues and I have lost a wonderful friend.