Joseph Meites

(1913–2005)

Prof. Joseph Meites died on January 31, 2005. He was an outstanding, internationally known and recognized pioneer of neuroendocrinology who contributed significantly to the formation of this new branch of science.

He was born in Kishinev, Moldavia, and his family moved to St. Joseph, Mo., USA, when he was 6 years old. He received his PhD from the University of Missouri, and he worked at the Department of Physiology of Michigan State University from 1947 until his retirement. He received the Junior and Senior Sigma Xi Awards and the Distinguished Faculty Award from this university.

Prof. Meites took his first course in endocrinology in 1938 while still an undergraduate student, and at that time was taught that the endocrine and nervous systems were separate and for the most part operated independently of each other to control body functions.

As a graduate student Prof. Meites became interested in the control of prolactin secretion and lactation. He studied the effects of drugs on these processes and made a number of important new observations. With his associates he found that many drugs could initiate lactation in estrogen-primed rats or rabbits. He also demonstrated that the ergot derivative, ergocornine, induced marked regression of mammary cancers in rats and profoundly depressed serum prolactin levels. His group demonstrated that ergot drugs act directly on the pituitary as well as on the hypothalamus to inhibit prolactin release.

Prof. Meites and his associates were among the first to report evidence of the presence of hypothalamic releasing and release-inhibiting factors in the hypothalamus. They observed that hypothalamic extracts could readily initiate mammary secretion. This was the first claim for a

prolactin-releasing factor in the hypothalamus. His group presented the first in vitro evidence of the presence of prolactin release-inhibiting activity (naming it prolactin-inhibiting factor, PIF) as well as the presence of growth hormone-releasing activity in the hypothalamus. His laboratory and Prof. McCann's group independently published the first evidence of the presence of follicle-stimulating hormone-releasing activity in the hypothalamus of rats. At present the existence of a separate FRF has become questionable, but the possibility has not been completely eliminated that a distinct FRF is present in the hypothalamus.

Prof. Meites and his associates performed several physiological studies on hypothalamic factors. They reported that the suckling stimulus during lactation is associated with a reduced PIF content of the hypothalamus and increased prolactin release. Furthermore they found that administration of prolactin reduces prolactin release and increases the PIF content in the hypothalamus. At present it is well known that stressful stimuli induce release of prolactin. Dr. Meites thus provided the first evidence that stress can evoke prolactin release. A number of observations on the relation of the neuroendocrine system to the development and growth of mammary tumors have also been reported by his group.

Together with his students and research fellows he published more than 400 scientific articles and several dozen book chapters.

Prof. Meites served on the editorial boards of many journals including *Endocrinology*, *Neuroendocrinology*, *Comparative and General Endocrinology*, *Proceedings of*

the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, and *Endokrinologie*, and was associate editor of *Cancer Research*. He was editor or co-editor of several books including *Pioneers in Neuroendocrinology*.

He participated with enthusiasm in the formation of the International Society of Neuroendocrinology and was its first president.

Dr. Meites was not only an enthusiastic and dedicated investigator but also an outstanding teacher and a wonderful mentor; many young, bright and motivated graduate students and postdoctoral fellows have benefited from their association with him. A total of about 30 graduate students and several dozen postdoctoral fellows came to his laboratory for additional training.

Dr. Meites was a most kind and generous man, always ready to help, and an unforgettable friend to all those who had the privilege of working closely with him.

Béla Halász