

## In Memoriam



**John Christian Gillin**

Our dear colleague, J. Christian Gillin, M.D.—renowned sleep specialist and professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and the Veterans Affairs San Diego Health System—died of esophageal cancer on Saturday, September 13, 2003. He was 65.

Chris was known internationally and honored widely for his seminal research on sleep and mood disorders. In 2001, he received the American Academy of Sleep Medicine's (AASM) Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his contributions to the advancement of sleep medicine. The same year, he received the Sleep Research Society's (SRS) Distinguished Scientist Award, at which time SRS called attention not only to his original scientific contributions, but also to his great accomplishment in the number of students he trained. In their words, "Many of the investigators in the next generation of sleep researchers can trace their scientific roots back to Dr. Gillin."

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Chris was a charter member of the Society for Light Treatment and Biological Rhythms (SLTBR) and served as President from 1994 to 1995. We now follow SRS in naming our Young Investigator Award in his memory. Chris served on this year's selection committee, and would surely be delighted with presentation of the award to Kelly J. Rohan, Ph.D., of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

Let us reflect on Chris' fundamental dignity, humanity, and positive approach to life coupled with his unquenchable scientific curiosity. He was an admired role model and inspired deep affection among his colleagues and students. In psychiatry, sleep, and chronobiology circles across the world, he enjoyed respect and admiration. He became one of the most influential leaders at the nexus of psychiatry and sleep. He personified the very best in human nature, and enriched everyone who crossed his path. Chris' closest friend and colleague, Saul Levine, M.D., UCSD professor of psychiatry and chair of psychiatry at Children's Hospital and Health Center, said it best: "What we all loved about him was that he was the epitome of grace. He lived with great zeal, and he loved people. In Yiddish he would say he was a real *mensch*, a person of intrinsic worth by virtue of his being."

Chris' love of family, friends, and the outdoors seemed to intensify after he was diagnosed with advanced cancer three years ago. An avid runner, he completed the Bay to Breakers Race in San Francisco just a few weeks before his diagnosis. A week after he learned of his cancer, he went paragliding for the first time! He remained active throughout his battle with the disease, and he went flying with a friend just weeks before his death. In typical manner, he turned his personal misfortune into positive opportunity by lecturing to medical students at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) on the subject of death and dying, sharing his experiences and insights.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, Chris credited his anthropologist father for sparking his interest in mental illness, while still a youngster. He recalled an encounter with a catatonic patient during a visit with his father to a mental hospital as having made a lasting impression on him. After college at Harvard, where he graduated magna cum laude, he earned his M.D. at Case Western Reserve School of Medicine and completed psychiatric training at Stanford University Medical Center.

Early in his career, Chris developed an interest in psychosis and the hallucinations of schizophrenia, which were the foci of his research during his initial years at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Fortunately for us, we can say in retrospect, he was assigned to the sleep laboratory and began working in the area of study that would become his legacy. Following 12 years at NIMH (1971–1982), he joined the UCSD faculty.

Chris' contributions to psychiatric research are reflected in over 500 scientific publications and one book. He liked to say that he viewed psychological disorders through neurobiological windows, and he used the principles and techniques of neuropharmacology, sleep, and chronobiology to approach the treatment of mood disorders.

The antidepressant effects of sleep deprivation in depressed patients always struck Chris as a neglected area of biological psychiatry. It was the only method known in which depression could be reversed within hours. He saw that sleep deprivation was an excellent experimental model for the study of antidepressant treatments and could lead to a set of rapidly acting treatments based upon new models of brain function. He dedicated his laboratory at UCSD to exploring these theories. Chris was also an active collaborator in studies of chronobiology and bright light treatment for depression, immunological relationships to sleep, and sleep abnormalities associated with depression, recovery, and abstinence in patients suffering alcohol abuse and dependence.



Chris served as president of SRS, SLTBR, and the West Coast College of Biological Psychiatry, and was on the board of directors of AASM. He was a fellow of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology and of the American Psychiatric Association. He served UCSD as the co-director of the Laboratory of Sleep and Chronobiology, director of the Fellowship Program in Psychobiology and Psychopharmacology, and director of the Mental Health Clinical Research Center. He was the founding Editor-in-Chief of *Neuropsychopharmacology*, and served on the editorial boards of nine journals. He served his country as U.S. Naval Reserve Captain, Medical Core.

Three years ago, shortly after his diagnosis, the UCSD Department of Psychiatry hosted a Festschrift to recognize Chris' enormous impact on the fields of sleep, mood disorders, and chronobiology, attended by nearly 200 scientists. This event highlighted friendships, scholarship, and leadership, which bonded Chris to colleagues around the nation and the world.

Throughout his illness, the Gillins continued to travel, explore, and spend quality time together, as he continued his scientific work, mentoring, and publishing. Chris is survived by his wife, Frances Gillin, Ph.D., UCSD professor of pathology, and their two sons, John Lorin Gillin and his wife Crystal Zhang Gillin of the Bay Area, and Peter Daniel Gillin of Costa Mesa.

*Sonia Ancoli-Israel, Ph.D.*

