

## Obituary

**Died:** Sunday, June 17, 2012

WAKSMAN, Byron H., M.D. A distinguished immunologist who pioneered the field of neuro-immunology, died on Sunday, June 17 in Lexington, Massachusetts. He was 92. Waksman graduated from Swarthmore College in 1940 and from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1943. He went on to an academic career at both Harvard/ Mass General Hospital and at Yale School of Medicine. He began his research career investigating experimental allergic encephalomyelitis, an artificially induced condition resembling multiple sclerosis, and similar inflammatory diseases of the nervous system, which he termed "auto-immune" diseases. Waksman and his students demonstrated the role of the thymus in both immune responses and tissue-specific tolerance. They are also credited with discovering several of the first and most important cytokines and circulating lymphocytes known as T-cells. After retiring from academia, Waksman became vice president for research and medicine at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, where he streamlined the granting process and improved communication between the board, patients and their families, and the media. One of his greatest achievements was to create a series of yearly workshops that brought together physicians and scientists involved with MS, from basic research to clinical treatments. These workshops and their published summaries successfully promoted cooperative work and moved the field of MS research and treatment forward substantially. Following his "second retirement," Waksman taught middle school students at the Salk School of Science in New York, an experience that convinced him of the urgent need to improve science education at the pre-college level. For more than 30 years, Waksman directed the Foundation for Microbiology, established in 1951 by his father, Nobel Laureate Selman Waksman, using patent royalties from the production of streptomycin, the first antibiotic for the treatment of tuberculosis. During his tenure, Waksman focused on improving science communication of every kind. In 1985 he initiated the Science Journalism Program at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, MA, and later created a similar international journalism program (EICOS) at the Max Plank Institute in Munich. He also launched a decade-long K-12 science education initiative training classroom teachers to use hands-on microbiology exercises. Waksman traveled widely both professionally and for pleasure, and he spoke many foreign languages fluently. He was a visiting investigator and/or teacher in France, Britain, Germany, Brazil, Venezuela, and Senegal. From 1961 onward, he served almost continuously on advisory panels of various government agencies, the World Health Organization, and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as on the editorial boards of scientific journals of immunology. Waksman published more than 350 papers and articles. Waksman's many colleagues, former students, and friends around the world cite his superlative teaching and the open, cooperative, and international atmosphere in his labs as his greatest legacy. Waksman is survived by his wife, Joyce; daughter, Nan Schanbacher; son, Peter; and five grandchildren. Memorial services will take place next summer in Woods Hole.

## Service Summary

- Service details not available -