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A mouse ate the noble prize

In making scientific advances, essential ingredients include scientific perseverance and utmost integrity. Temptation by personal fame can go too far with consequent scientific tragedies – as actually happened to a legendary scientist whom I will talk about. RAG was born to parents in the teaching profession. As a child, he watched his father die from cancer – an event that might have influenced his career choice. He was the first at his university to obtain combined MD and PhD degrees at the age of 25. He received training in pediatrics followed by immunology fellowship, then appointed to the faculty and reached the rank of Professor at the age of 32. His research mostly focused on transplantation immunology. He demonstrated the role of the thymus and described the humoral and cell-mediated arms of immunity. His publications exceeded 2000 and trained >300, most of whom became academic leaders. He received 13 Honorary Doctorate Degrees and multiple lifetime achievement awards. His exceptional contributions earned him the title “Father of Modern Immunology.” He was recruited to direct a world renowned institute for cancer research where he Supervised the research of a large number of distinguished scientists. Because of dishonesty of a co-researcher, he moved to another institution where he founded research laboratories, built a major clinical immunology service, and initiated a training program. He maintained full-time duties until his death from cancer at the age of 81. RAG’s illustrious career was marred by a scientific fraud committed by one of his faculty members who claimed successful transplantation of skin grafts between two genetically unrelated strains of mice, while in fact he just made incision of a patch in the white mouse skin and painted it black. This unfortunate incident is believed by many to have cost RAG the Nobel Prize in Medicine.

Biography

Sami L Bahna is a Professor and Chief of Allergy/Immunology at Louisiana State University in Shreveport, and Director of its Allergy/Immunology Training Program. Received MD with Honors at Cairo University, Doctorate in Public Health at Alexandria University, and Research Fellowship at University of Bergen, Norway. Had Pediatric Residency at University of Maryland and Allergy/Immunology Fellowship at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. Certified by the American Board of Pediatrics and American Board of Allergy/Immunology. Fellow of the ACAAI, AAAAI, EAACI, AAP, Society of Pediatric Research. Published 185 papers and 39 book chapters. Served on the Executive Committee of the AAP Allergy Section, Board of Regents and Executive Committee of American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, and Board of Directors of the Joint Council of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology. Served on editorial boards of several journals. Was President of the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (2009-2010). Received numerous national and international awards.

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