

Obituary

Lou Lasagna, 1923–2003

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Lou Lasagna passed away on August 6, 2003, at the age of 80. Can you remember anything about the year 1949? Lou Lasagna published his first scientific paper in 1949, and his academic career spanned the next 54 years until the time of his death. For those who knew him well, witnessing his last years was painful. His usually buoyant spirit was pulled down by the burden of chronic illness and by the inevitable disconnection from his professional life through retirement (although only partial).

Born in New York City to Italian immigrant parents, Lou grew up in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and graduated from Rutgers University. After completing medical school at Columbia and serving in the US Navy, Lou trained in medicine at Maimonides and Mt Sinai hospitals in New York City, then joined the Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics at Hopkins (1950–1952). After 2 years in Boston at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital (1952–1954), he rejoined

the faculty at Hopkins in 1954, and established the nation's first clinical pharmacology program. In 1970, he became chairman of the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology at the University of Rochester. In 1984, at the age of 61, Lou moved to Boston to become Dean of the Sackler School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences at Tufts University School of Medicine.

Lou Lasagna was an intellectual leader during the phase of phenomenal growth and development of pharmacology and therapeutics that has taken place in the postwar era. He was a founding father of the discipline of clinical pharmacology, laying the groundwork and setting the standards for the intellectual content and scientific excellence of clinical pharmacology, as well as establishing training and manpower needs and the structural bases for postdoctoral training programs. He and his co-workers were pioneers in the recognition of the placebo effect, the need for placebo controls in drug development, and the principles of the double-blind randomized clinical trial methodology. Over the decades Lou was also an unyielding strong advocate of sound scientific principles and administrative logic in the process of drug approval and regulation by the Food and Drug Administration. His public contributions as well as his behind-the-scenes activities have had a major impact on the evolution of the structure and function of the FDA and the governmental regulatory process. While at Rochester, Lou established the Center for Study for Drug Development, an independent organization that studies, monitors, and reports on the nation's most important intellectual resources for the study of drug development and regulation. The Center moved to Tufts with Lou, and it continues to prosper and to make important contributions to understanding the drug development process. Finally, through his position of leadership in academic medicine, Lou was responsible for the training of hundreds of scientists, many of whom have themselves gone on to positions of leadership and influence.

Lou Lasagna received numerous recognitions and awards over the course of his long career. Two professorships have been endowed in his name. He has served on many highly visible and influential national and international advisory boards and policy-setting groups. He received the Award for Experimental Therapeutics (1976) and the Harry Gold Award (1983) from the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, and the Oscar B Hunter Award (1975) from the American Society for Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics. Lou was an early member and a tireless supporter of ACNP, and served as our president in 1980. He was the initiator and proud father of the first of the ACNP travel awards: the Mead Johnson Travel Awards. Now, of course, they are named the Bristol-Myers Squibb Travel Awards. Many alumni of that program have gone on to distinguished careers and some, even, to membership in the ACNP!

On a personal level, it always has been difficult for me to connect the Lou Lasagna that I knew to the list of

achievements and accomplishments. To me, he was an optimistic, unassuming friend, and mentor whom I had the privilege of working with on a day-to-day basis for nearly 20 years. I learned something new about science or life or

leadership each time I talked to him. This is the Lou Lasagna that I will miss.

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