

Obituary

Emeritus Professor Allan John Day (1927-2013)

Pioneering medical researcher's work co-existed with Christian faith



A research pioneer in the pathophysiology of atherosclerosis and cholesterol metabolism, Professor Emeritus Allan J. Day has died in Melbourne in his 86th year.

Allan Day began a long association with Adelaide University at the age of fifteen when he began studies in science leading to BSc and MSc degrees. Switching to medicine, Day qualified as a doctor (MBBS) and embarked on a career in medical research, ultimately achieving an MD degree. He then spent three years at Oxford University working at the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology under fellow South Australian, and Nobel laureate, Howard Florey, gaining the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1957. Many years later, Day was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science by Melbourne University.

His early research in the late 1940s, with Everton Trethewie at the University of Adelaide, investigated tissue injury and the toxicity of Australian snake venoms. These studies, supported by grants from the National Health and Medical Research Council, identified the cardiovascular effects of different combinations of antihistamines and anticoagulants used to mitigate the toxic effects of these venoms. They also studied the extraction of anticoagulants from liver and clotting times in surgical patients.

From the 1950s, Allan Day's research focused on the study of atherosclerosis (or the hardening and thickening of the arteries), particularly in relation to serum lipids and cholesterol metabolism more generally. These studies also included NHMRC-supported research of serum cholesterol and phospholipid levels of Aborigines living nomadically in the Haast's Bluff region of central Australia. At that time, native Australians had lower serum cholesterol levels than white Australians, attributed to their much lower dietary intake of fat. Central Australian Aborigines also showed no elevation of serum cholesterol with ageing, in contrast to the increase shown in the white population.

After being promoted to Reader at the University of Adelaide, Allan Day was in 1967 recruited to the chair of physiology at the University of Melbourne, bringing with him significant grant funding that enabled him to quickly establish a thriving research laboratory. His studies over more

than thirty years through to the 1980s advanced our understanding of the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis and led to many high-quality original contributions that documented the role of macrophages, cholesterol and lipid metabolism within the arterial wall.

In addition to his significant research activities, Allan Day made considerable contributions to teaching at the University of Melbourne. These were detailed in *Life's Logic*, Dr Juliet Flesch's dynamic account of the first 150 years of the Department of Physiology at the University of Melbourne, published in 2012.

Allan Day was for ten years Director of Physiology and Examiner to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, during which time his teaching methods were also incorporated into the undergraduate courses in Physiology at the University. His career at the University of Melbourne also included study leave abroad, where he promoted his research and established long-term successful collaborations with researchers in Canada and Germany.

Professor Day retired from the Department of Physiology in 1988 after a distinguished career as an internationally renowned researcher and teacher.

Allan Day's multifaceted interests included his research, teaching, family and Christian commitment, as well as sailing, photography and travel. He was committed to his academic work, to the pursuit of excellence, promotion of knowledge and the understanding of truth. From his teenage years he expressed and nurtured a strong Christian faith and wanted his funeral service to affirm the Christian hope that there is transformation beyond physical death.

As an undergraduate, Day served as president of the Evangelical Union at Adelaide University. Later, he served as a Deacon at Unley Park Baptist Church in Adelaide. In Melbourne he was active at Kew Baptist Church and, latterly, at St Hilary's Anglican Church in Kew, where he was keenly involved in after-church discussion groups. He was never shy about challenging a preacher over some aspects of a sermon or theological interpretation. After retirement, Day gained a Bachelor of Theology degree and was appointed an Academic Fellow at Ridley College.

Day's interest in the interface between scientific knowledge and Christian faith was fostered initially through the Research Scientists' Christian Fellowship in collaboration with long-time friend and Adelaide colleague, psychologist Professor Malcolm Jeeves (since 1969 at St Andrew's University in Scotland). In promoting dialogue at the science-faith interface and writing several papers on the subject, he became adept at applying his analytical mind and philosophical rigour equally to countering fundamentalist Christian claims and post-modernist atheism alike.

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In his most important article, 'Adam, Anthropology and the Genesis Record', *Science & Christian Belief* (1998) 10 2, 115-143, Day explained how ancient biblical texts can be understood in a way consistent with modern biology and anthropology. His lecture course on Science and Christian belief, jointly sponsored by ISCAST (Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology) and Ridley College, Melbourne, embodied a lifetime of thought. First presented in 1997, it proved very popular.

These various activities were only curtailed by worsening macular degeneration and musculoskeletal problems, although he remained a mentor to many in the science-faith arena. His active mind had become imprisoned in a frail body that prevented his indulging his passions for learning, reading and communicating.

He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Joan, their four children and eight grandchildren.

Professor Day was a member of the Editorial Board of *Science & Christian Belief* from 2002 until his death.

This obituary was compiled by Professors Gordon Lynch and Stephen Harrap from the Department of Physiology at the University of Melbourne, Allan Day's eldest son, Dr Timothy Day, and Emeritus Professor John Pilbrow, a friend for more than 45 years. It appeared in *The Melbourne Age* on 1 November 2013 and is reproduced here with permission.
