

Homage to Mark Wainberg

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AIDS 2017, **31**:1349–1350



Mark Wainberg, PhD, Professor in the departments of Medicine, Microbiology and Immunology and in Pediatrics at McGill University, pioneered studies on HIV drug resistance and became a vibrant advocate for antiretroviral treatment access worldwide.

He died tragically of an asthma attack that he suffered while swimming with his family on April 11, 2017 in Bal Harbour, Florida.

Dr. Wainberg received his bachelor's degree at McGill University, Montreal in 1966, and his Ph.D from Columbia

University, New York City in 1972. He did post-doctoral research at Hadassah Medical School at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. After an initial focus on immune responses in chickens bearing tumours induced by Rous sarcoma virus, he used his skills and tools to contribute to the fight against the newly devastating outbreak of AIDS.

As the founder and Director of the McGill University AIDS Centre, at the Lady Davis Institute in Montreal, he pioneered the scientific response against HIV. Dr. Wainberg and colleagues were the first to identify 3TC (lamivudine) as a new antiretroviral, in close collaboration with the Quebec-based company BioChem Pharma Inc, in 1989. Soon after, he recognized that drug-induced viral mutations led to treatment failure, providing a rationale for the development of combination therapy with Dr. Julio Montaner in Vancouver. His contributions to the understanding of mechanisms of drug resistance brought further focus to this important issue.

In 1998 he was elected president of the International AIDS Society and organized the XIII International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa that highlighted issues on treatment access in the resource-limited world. He was also co-chair of the XVI International AIDS Conference held in Toronto and a past president of the Canadian Association for HIV Research (CAHR).

Dr. Wainberg received numerous awards and recognition for his research. He was made an Officer of the

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Order of Canada, and an Officer of the National Order of Quebec, both being the highest civilian honours. He was recognized for his accomplishments by the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame. He was honoured by being awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, the highest honour given by France.

Most importantly, Mark was a devoted and vocal advocate for people living with HIV. He championed the easy access of antiretroviral therapy to all countries and acted as

an activist against “HIV denialists”, such as the former South African President Thabo Mbeki.

Beyond being an outstanding scientist and advocate, Mark exuded warmth and had a wonderful sense of humour. He trained and mentored a full generation of scientists from all over the world that will continue his work to definitively end the HIV epidemic.

His contributions to science and health and his warm and sincere friendship will always be remembered.