

International Forum for the Study of Itch (IFSI)

IFSI, 2200 Silas Creek Parkway Suite 7B, Winston-Salem NC 27103 USA



IFSI NEWSLETTER July 2020

Dear IFSI Members,

With this newsletter we would like to inform you about current developments in our society.

In memoriam of Alan Cowan, PhD

Alan Cowan, an IFSI member since 2006, passed away on June 30th 2020. He was 77 years old. He started to be an IFSI member just a few months after IFSI had been founded in Heidelberg, Germany in 2005 during the 3rd World Congress of Itch. This demonstrates how much he was interested in itch and how much he trusted IFSI to become an international society. Together with Gil Yosipovitch he edited in 2015 the book "Pharmacology of itch" (Handbook of Experimental Pharmacology, Vol. 226). Several IFSI members contributed an article.

Alan Cowan was a Professor of Pharmacology at the Temple University School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, USA for 44 years, most recently as a member of the Center for Substance Abuse Research. He became a Professor Emeritus in 2012, but continued to do research until recently. Dr. Cowan received his BSc in Pharmacy from Glasgow University, Scotland in 1964, his ARCST in Pharmacy from the Royal College of Science and Technology in 1964 and his PhD in Pharmacology from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow in 1968. In his first professional position, he led the small research team that conducted the original preclinical pharmacology on buprenorphine over the period 1971-1976 at Reckitt and Colman in Hull, England. Buprenorphine has been used to treat opioid addiction and holds promise for treatment of psychiatric illnesses, particularly depression. Each member of the team was awarded the Queen's Award for Technological Achievement in 1985. His research was mainly focused on the in vivo (rodent) pharmacology of opioids acting on the mu, delta and kappa opioid receptors, particularly analgesic and anti-pruritic effects, inhibition of gastrointestinal transit and temperature regulation. In addition, he also worked on several neuropeptides. His group for the first time reported that bombesin-like peptides induce repetitive scratching in mice and rats in the 1980s, eventually leading to the identification of gastrin-releasing peptide as a key spinal neurotransmitter for mediating histamine-independent itch.

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His lab demonstrated in the 1980s that benzomorphan compounds with preferential agonism at kappa opioid receptors, inhibited bombesin-induced scratching and subsequently reported chemically diverse kappa agonists (e.g., tifluadom and U50,488) to be active in the scratch test. These studies led to the eventual discovery of a clinical antipruritic candidate – CR845.

IFSI lost a great scientist and a very good friend. He will always be remembered.

WCI 2021 cancelled

Due to the insecurities in health and instable world economical situation the IFSI Board of Directors decided to cancel the World Congress of Itch (WCI) in Shanghai, China, 2021. As a substitute, we may offer a smaller virtual congress in 2021. Furthermore, we will observe the worldwide situation. We are positive that we can definitely organize the WCI in 2023 as a Face-to-face congress again. We will keep our members and those being interested informed about this. Stay safe and healthy!

Honorary IFSI members

The IFSI board decided to introduce honorary IFSI membership. Jeffrey D. Bernhard, MD, USA, Yasushi Kuraishi, PhD, Japan, and Hermann Handwerker, MD, PhD, Germany, have been selected to be honorary IFSI members. They will be honored for their significant and outstanding contributions to research, education and visibility of the itch field and their dedications to IFSI.

With best wishes!

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