Professor Dharam P. Agarwal of the Institute of Human Genetics, University of Hamburg, Germany, has just passed away at the age of 64 years. His death is a severe loss to the scientific community and especially to those who were very close to him. Actually, Dharam never overcame the early death of his beloved wife, Krishna, who died shortly before him. He leaves behind two children, Kamayni, now an anaesthesiologist in Hamburg, and Prabhat, a senior scientist in Brussels. Dharam was Indian by birth, but lived in Germany for more than 35 years, first in Freiburg and later in Hamburg. But, truly, Dharam was a real world citizen, who had friends all over the globe. I met Dharam for the first time in the mid-1980s when he was already in Hamburg, shortly after he had become known worldwide as an expert in genetics. Together with the late Professor Goedde, he was the first to clarify the mechanism of the alcohol-associated flushing syndrome in Asians. With Goedde and Harada, he found a mutation in the acetaldehyde dehydrogenase-2 gene, which leads to an enzyme with low activity. This mutation renders the enzyme no longer capable of handling adequately the acetaldehyde produced from alcohol. Thus, the resulting increase in acetaldehyde is responsible for the flushing syndrome in those individuals who carry this mutation. As a result, they have tachycardia, vomiting, sweating and flushing after the intake of even small doses of alcohol. Dharam spent most of his scientific life studying genetic determinants of alcohol use, misuse and dependence. An international meeting on this topic without the presence of Professor Dharam Agarwal was unthinkable in the 1980s and 1990s.

Dharam Pal Agarwal was born in Lucknow, India in 1938. He received his PhD in Biochemistry at Lucknow University in 1965 and became Privatdozent in Human Genetics at Hamburg University in 1977. He also received a DSc in Biochemistry at Lucknow University, India, in 1999. His major area of research was genetics of alcohol metabolism. Later on, he also concentrated on the cardioprotective role of moderate alcohol intake. Dharam published over 160 contributions in international journals. He was a member of the Editorial Boards of various journals, including Alcohol and Alcoholism, Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, Addiction, Addiction Biology, International Journal of Human Genetics and others. He was author of seven books and received many national and international awards for his significant contributions to human genetics, including the Dr Vishwa Nath Gold Medal for the year 1998–1999.

However, beyond his scientific contributions and merits, Dharam was an extraordinary human being with an intensive interest in literature, poetry, music and radioplays. He also had a keen interest in anthropology and human evolution and was particularly interested in Hindu spiritual writings and religious ceremonies. From 1990 to 2000, he and his late wife, Krishna, organized annual Ramayan readings, in which the whole Indian community of Hamburg enthusiastically participated. Thus, Dharam was not only a scientific teacher and an academic person of outstanding quality, he was also a broadly educated, intellectual man and a wonderful human being with whom it was always a pleasure to be and to discuss scientific topics as well as topics of other origin. Despite his outstanding success, Dharam remained an extraordinarily kind and modest person. I still remember our last big International Congress, which was organized by Dharam and myself in Titisee in December 1999. He and his wonderful wife were splendid hosts for many scientists from all over the world. We all enjoyed this meeting in a friendly and humorous atmosphere, which was predominantly created by Dharam and Krishna. The death of his wife put a dark shadow on his own life and he suffered very much. With the death of Dharam Pal Agarwal, we have lost an extraordinary scientist, an intellectual cosmopolitan, a kind gentleman and a very good friend. His friends will always remember him and we promise his children, Kamayni and Prabhat, to carry his memory close to our hearts.

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