John Laragh: Scientific Pioneer

Theodore W. Kurtz

Although I did not have the privilege of working with John Laragh in the laboratory or in the clinic, his visionary research has inspired me and many others interested in the problem of hypertension. John led the charge that opened up the modern phase of hypertension management in which physicians began to recognize the importance of tailoring therapy to the needs of the individual patient. He pioneered in the field of “personalized” medicine and relentlessly pursued its refinement in hypertension practice long before the term became popular among investigators interested in molecular biology and genomics. He also pioneered in the research and clinical use of renin-angiotensin inhibitors at a time when others doubted the importance of this system in essential hypertension and remained wedded to the idea of using diuretics as initial antihypertensive therapy in virtually all patients. He pioneered in “translational research” years before others began using this term to describe the integration of laboratory research, patient-oriented research, and population-based research aimed at improving the health of individuals and the public. Today, many scientists and clinicians take these approaches to hypertension research and treatment for granted. Many have not learned about, or have forgotten, the personal and scientific struggles involved in bringing these concepts to the fore. John often remarks that scientists are quick to forget the details of what has been said and done in the past. But long after the details and history of the scientific discoveries and debates are forgotten, I will remember how his pioneering efforts advanced the discipline and stimulated the minds of a multitude of basic science and clinical investigators around the world.

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