In Memoriam

B. Lowell Langille (1947–2008)

Michelle Bendeck, Avrum Gotlieb

Our dear colleague and friend Lowell Langille died on October 29, 2008 at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto. We will miss Lowell’s leadership in our department and in the world of vascular biology and atherosclerosis. Lowell was held in very high regard by all of us, and not the least by his many trainees. We appreciated his enthusiasm for science, his persistence in asking and answering relevant questions, and, in particular, his patience. He would often stop someone as he or she passed the open door of his office to show an exciting live image clip of a particular protein function that he was studying in an endothelial or smooth muscle cell. We often felt that we had trouble “keeping up,” but he was always willing to stop and explain the physics of vascular biology. His honesty and integrity will serve as an example to guide us in science and in life.

Lowell obtained his BSc degree in physics (1969, first class honors) and his PhD in zoology (1975) from the University of British Columbia. His PhD supervisor, David Jones, introduced Lowell to biology, and he studied the comparative hemodynamics of vertebrates. This launched his career at the intersection of biology and physics. He received his postdoctoral training at the University of Western Ontario with Dr Margot Roach, where he worked with labmates Michael Reidy and Norm Smith. Michael and Lowell became good friends and developed a common interest in the cell biology of the endothelium, an area in which Lowell continued to work for the rest of his life. He accepted a faculty position in the Department of Physiology at the University of Western Ontario.

Lowell came to the University of Toronto in 1985, moving to Toronto to explore new career opportunities along with his wife, Lee Adamson, who was starting her career as a research scientist at Mt Sinai Hospital. He was supported by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario Career Investigator Award for 12.5 years (maximum tenure) as an Associate and then Full Professor of Pathology (Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology). He worked very closely with Avrum Gotlieb, and these two scientists established a cohesive Vascular Biology Research Group, which was the home and source of inspiration for many graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. At the time of his death, he was Director of a Program Grant from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario entitled, “The Cell Biology of Atherosclerosis,” which is now in its second 5-year term. He was also Director of the Centre of Imaging Cellular Function, a live cell microscopy facility at the Toronto General Research Institute.

Lowell was an internationally known vascular cell biologist and physiologist who studied adaptive and pathological remodeling of blood vessels. Key findings from his laboratory have characterized arterial adaptations to chronic changes in blood flow rate (shear stress) at the macroscopic, cellular, and subcellular levels, and he and his colleagues have defined important processes that contribute to arterial occlusion. He has published in leading general science journals including, Science, Nature, The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, and extensively in leading cardiovascular journals, and he has contributed chapters to 13 textbooks, as well as many review articles. His research was supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario.

Lowell trained 21 graduate students (10 PhD and 11 MSc) and he had formerly served 3 years as the Graduate Coordinator for the Department of Pathology. He was an excellent mentor, and several of his trainees have been appointed to the editors or of the American Heart Association.

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academic positions at Canadian and American Universities. He taught extensively in the Departments of Pathology, Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology, Physiology, and Mechanical Engineering. He was a recipient of the John B. Walter Prize for innovative Teaching/Education from the Department of Pathology at the University of Toronto.

Lowell was on the Editorial Board of leading cardiovascular journals, including Circulation Research, The Journal of Vascular Research, and Endothelium. He had participated in the organization of numerous international conferences, including acting as the Co-Chair of the 13th International Vascular Biology Meeting (2004). Lowell had served on Scientific Review Panels for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, and was the Chair of a Scientific Review Committee (1999–2001) for the latter. In addition, he was honored as the Alan C. Burton Lecturer, Department of Medical Biophysics, University of Western Ontario.

Lowell was an accomplished snooker player in his youth, and was known to challenge new graduate students in his laboratory to a game. He is also remembered as a valuable player on the Pathology Summer Student’s baseball team. He was an avid moviegoer before the birth of his daughter Ellen, but afterward, he said that he found Ellen “even more entertaining than the movies.” Later on, with his family, he took up the challenge of new sports including dog-sledding and horseback riding.

Our deepest sympathies go out to Lowell’s wife, Lee, and to his daughter, Ellen. In honor of Lowell and his dedication to cardiovascular research, The Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology has established The Lowell Langille Memorial Fund to receive donations in his memory for the promotion of vascular research in our department. Donations should be made payable to: University of Toronto – LMP. Mailed to: Laboratory Medicine & Pathobiology, 100 College St Rm 110, Toronto, ON M5G 1L5, Canada. Please reference: In Memory of Lowell Langille.
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