
In memoriam **Jeffrey M. Isner**

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This communication celebrates the life of Jeffrey M. Isner, one of the world's foremost authorities on gene replacement therapy. He died suddenly October 31 at age 53, of a massive heart attack.

Dr. Isner received his MD from Tufts University School of Medicine. Following completion of training in Internal Medicine and Cardiology, he was a Staff Associate in the Pathology Branch of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Prior to establishing the Cardiovascular Research Laboratories at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center, he was Associate Director of the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory at the New England Medical Center. Dr. Isner was Professor of Medicine and Pathology at Tufts University School of Medicine, Chief of Vascular Medicine and Chief of Cardiovascular Research at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center of Boston.

Dr. Isner's arrival at St. Elizabeth's catalyzed the organization of one of the first multidisciplinary collaborations in the USA for the treatment of peripheral vascular disease, for which Dr. Isner received a 5-year Academic Award in Vascular Medicine from the NIH. In 1996, Dr. Isner received the Outstanding Faculty Achievement Award from Tufts University, the W. Proctor Harvey Distinguished Alumnus Award (Georgetown University Division of Cardiology), and the William Beaumont Award, given annually by the American Medical Association to one individual under age 50 for meritorious research. In 1999, he received the Award of Merit in recognition of outstanding contributions to the study of cardiovascular pathology from the Society for Cardiovascular Pathology. In 2000 he was the recipient of the prestigious MERIT Award from the NIH, providing 10 years of uninterrupted grant support, and in 2001 was awarded a Program Pro-

ject Grant from the NIH for a "Center of Excellence" in Gene Therapy. He trained numerous post-doctoral fellows, 16 of whom have either won or been selected as finalists for Young Investigator Awards.

Dr. Isner will be remembered by the science community and the patients he treated as one of the pioneers who laid the foundation of gene therapy for cardiovascular diseases. He had been working for years to induce blood vessels to grow in patients whose ischemic limbs were threatened with amputation and whose hearts were too sick for bypass surgery. His work earned admiration from throughout the medical community and his innovative findings attracted the attention of the national and international press. Along the way, he was responsible for some major milestones in the field of gene therapy. In 1989, he injected the first genetically engineered human cells into the first human patient. Five years later, on December 7, 1994, Dr. Isner's team performed the first case of human cardiovascular arterial gene transfer. Subsequently, Dr. Isner's group has initiated human gene therapy trials for angiogenesis and restenosis, including lower extremity as well as myocardial angiogenesis. His laboratory in 1996 identified the presence of circulating endothelial progenitor cells in the systemic circulation and has since pursued fundamental and applied studies of the contribution these cells make to neovascularization and angiogenesis. Just prior to his death, he received a \$10 million grant from the NIH to continue his pioneering work.

It was a great privilege for me to have had Dr. Isner as a mentor and a friend. After graduating in medicine at the "Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore" of Rome, I have joined Dr. Isner's team at St. Elizabeth's, where I have been working over the last 3 years. I had the unique opportunity to

learn from his expertise and genuine enthusiasm for science. Together we studied the role of the hedgehog morphogens in ischemic diseases and postnatal angiogenesis. His continuous support helped me during difficult times of research, his constant encouragement taught me to never give up, and this allowed me to achieve. His warm attitude with young colleagues was returned with admiration and love. Dr. Isner was a gentleman able to attract respect and attention and, until the end, his life was committed to research and science. After all, the day before his sudden death he was enthusiastically discussing the results of my research with me and we shared our happiness about the state of a NIH grant we were writing together. I will always remember his words in the last e-mail he sent me: "The grant looks great, Roberto. Keep it up!". And this, I plan to

do. In honor of my mentor who gave me many insights and the tools to achieve in the scientific world, I would like to continue in cardiovascular research and allow his legacy to live on.

I know that just as I will miss Dr. Isner and his continuous reinforcement, critical input, and generosity, the world will also miss this medical and scientific superstar. A superstar that now shines down upon us, to give us strength and knowledge to finish what he had only just begun.

Roberto Pola, MD, PhD

Department of Medicine (Cardiovascular Research)

St. Elizabeth's Medical Center

Tufts University School of Medicine

Boston, MA, USA

