

Julius A. Vida, PhD

medical pioneer, dies at 90

June 2018

Julius A. Vida, PhD, a prominent Hungarian-American chemist and pharmaceutical expert who identified and negotiated agreements for medical advances that led to treatments for cancer, heart disease, and HIV/AIDS, died on June 10, 2018, at his home in Greenwich, CT. He was 90.

With just a dictionary and the clothes on his back, Vida arrived alone in Camp Kilmer, New Jersey as a refugee fleeing the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. He became a proud American citizen whose contributions to healthcare helped save and alleviate the suffering of countless lives around the world.

A master negotiator who believed, “Only a good agreement can last and a good agreement has to benefit both parties”. Vida approached his life with intellectual curiosity and a sense of purpose. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of the global pharmaceutical industry, and built his professional life on personal relationships, an extensive scientific background and his business acumen.

As Vice President of Business Development, Licensing and Strategic Planning at Bristol-Myers Squibb, Vida identified drugs in development and negotiated more than 25 licensing agreements, significantly improving choices in patient care. Many of Vida’s licenses became the products of the first US pharmaceutical industry’s portfolio of anti-cancer therapies and remain in use to this day. Additionally, he was instrumental in negotiating a major alliance with French pharmaceutical giant Sanofi, which led to the launch of the cardiovascular product Plavix®, in the US market.



Vida’s licenses for two antiviral compounds profoundly changed the lives of HIV-positive men and women worldwide. John Martin, Chairman of the Board of Gilead Sciences, speaking in 2011 on the anniversary of the compound which is now marketed as Viread® (tenofovir), remarked, “I took the opportunity to reflect on Julius’ accomplishments in the licenses for D4T (Zerit®) and Viread® and how these two drugs changed the treatment of AIDS from a death sentence to a chronic condition.”

He continued that it was Vida’s cultural background which prepared him for the challenging licensing negotiations with groups in Prague in 1986. Martin added that in 2011, 90% of patients starting treatment for HIV in the US were taking some form of Viread®. Vida’s second historic achievement was his



leadership at Bristol-Myers Squibb in making clinical trials possible for cancer drug Taxol® - significantly improving the outcome for breast and ovarian cancer patients around the world. At the time, the active compound in Taxol® was only available in minute quantities from the endangered Pacific Yew tree. Vida worked with field scientists at Weyerhaeuser, a forestry company, to create a reliable, sustainable alternative source of the starting material in the form of a bush.

After retiring from BMS in 1993, Vida founded Vida International Pharmaceutical Consultants. He became a mentor, board member and advisor to companies in whose patent portfolios he found what he called 'fantasy', a term he used to describe the creative potential of a patent in the broader market. He serve on Boards including Biomatrix, Medarex,

FibroGen and Spectrum Pharmaceuticals. He was also a senior consultant to American Home Products Corporation and Pharmacia-Upjohn.

Over the course of his nine decades, Vida developed 27 patents and wrote 90 books, chapters, and articles in scientific publications including the highly regarded source "Steroids and Anabolic Agents".

In his native Hungary, Vida earned a diploma in Chemistry from Eötvös Loránd University. After emigrating to the US, he gained a MS and PhD in Chemistry from the Carnegie Institute (now Carnegie Mellon University). He did post-doctoral work with Nobel Laureate R.B. Woodward at Harvard University and later acquired an MBA from Columbia University. In 2005, he was recognized with the Carnegie Mellon Alumni Merit Award and, in 2006, with the Licensing Society of North America's Frank Barnes Mentor Award.

Vida was born in Losonc, Hungary the son of Dr. Gyula Vida and Erzsébet Lonsonczi. He is survived by his wife, Martha, and children Julie Vida-Tabb, André Vida, Nicholas Vida and Katie Vida.

In lieu of flowers, gifts may be made to Carnegie Mellon University, the Dr. Julius A. Vida, S 1960, 1961 Fellowship in Chemistry and mailed to Carnegie Mellon, Dr. Julius Vida Fund, c/o Gift Administration, Carnegie Mellon University, PO Box 371525, Pittsburgh, PA 15251-7525 or to the Friends for Cos Cob Library, 5 Sinaway Road, Cos Cob, CT 06807.

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