

Obituary

Henri Begleiter, 1935–2006

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Dr Henri Begleiter, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, SUNY Downstate Medical Center at Brooklyn, died in his sleep 6 April 2006, at home in Long Island, NY. He was a leader in the fields of neuroscience, alcoholism, and genetics and will be greatly missed by all who were fortunate enough to have known him, and been inspired by his scientific vision and infectious enthusiasm.

Henri Begleiter was born in Nîmes, France in 1935. As a child, during the German occupation of France, he was sheltered in a monastery in the mountains of the Massif Central, separated from his parents throughout the war. Although this traumatic experience could have adversely affected his perspective on life, it probably strengthened his character, will power, and above all, his *joie de vivre*.

Dr Begleiter's research career has been an incredible journey—progressing from early animal and human work on brain hyperexcitability in alcoholics to subsequent findings that this hyperexcitability is critically involved in the genetic predisposition toward the development of alcoholism, substance abuse, conduct disorder, and anti-social personality disorder—an amalgam of disorders now known as externalizing disorders.

Starting with the ground-breaking finding, published in *Science*, that some neurophysiological anomalies in alcoholics were already present in their young offspring before any exposure to alcohol and drugs, he proposed a model that changed the thinking in the field: namely, rather than a consequence of alcoholism, this neural hyperexcitability was a predisposing factor leading to the development of alcoholism and related disorders. This innovative study was replicated throughout the world and launched him on a systematic search to elucidate the genes underlying this predisposition.

Over 17 years ago, with his foresight and charismatic leadership, Dr Begleiter was instrumental in organizing the largest study in the world focused on the genetics of alcoholism, the Collaborative Study on the Genetics of Alcoholism (COGA), which he led since its inception. Dr Begleiter placed much emphasis on the use of brain oscillations as endophenotypes, and this approach has proven successful in identifying genes involved in the predisposition to developing alcoholism and related disorders and is still state-of-the-art today. One major finding was the discovery that the GABRA2 receptor gene is involved in human EEG beta oscillations as well as in a predisposition for alcoholism and related disorders. These findings have recently been replicated in several laboratories. Another COGA finding was that a cholinergic muscarinic receptor gene (CHRM2) is involved in theta and delta oscillations underlying P3, and that the same gene is also associated with alcoholism and depression.

Dr Begleiter was a member of numerous science-professional organizations and was a past president of the Research Society on Alcoholism (RSA). He received many awards during his career, including the RSA Research Excellence and Service Awards, and the international James B Isaacson and EM Jellinek Awards in recognition of his stellar research contributions.

Henri Begleiter was an enthusiastic man with many interests. He read voraciously, so that one could have challenging and stimulating discussions with him on any topic at any time. He enjoyed classical music and jazz, traveled extensively, loved to cook and was a connoisseur of fine wine and French cuisine. He is survived by his wife Esther, his neurologist daughter, Dr Alison Begleiter Siegel, his ER physician son, Dr David Begleiter, his son-in-law, Dr Noah Siegel (ENT), and two grandsons, Daniel and Benjamin.

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