

Obituary

Juhn Atsushi Wada, O.C., M.D., Med.Sc.D., F.A.A.N., F.R.C.P.(C), D.Sc. *h.c.*
1924–2023

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the death of Dr. Juhn Wada, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Psychiatry and Neurosciences at UBC, at his home in Vancouver. He was Co-founder of the Canadian League Against Epilepsy (CLAE) and President of the CLAE from 1977 to 1979. He had just celebrated his 99th birthday.

Dr. Wada was born in Tokyo in 1924. He earned his M.D. from Hokkaido Imperial University in Sapporo at 22 and his Med.Sc.D. at 26, becoming an Assistant Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry a year later in 1951. Leaving post-war Japan, he joined the University of Minnesota in 1954 and then the Montreal Neurological Institute (MNI) in 1955. Though he had always expected to return to Japan, he joined the Medical Faculty at UBC in 1956, where he would remain through to his retirement in 1994.

As a young clinician researcher at Hokkaido University, he devised a technique to determine hemisphere dominance for speech. This involved the injection of barbiturate into the carotid artery, anesthetizing one hemisphere of the brain. This procedure, which became known as the Wada test, was further refined to assess memory during his time at the MNI and became the gold standard to assess hemisphere dominance for language and memory. It is still performed at many centres. The Wada test made an appearance in an episode of CBC's *The Nature of Things* and in the American television show *Grey's Anatomy*.

Dr. Wada was the quintessential clinician scientist. He established the Adult Epilepsy Program at UBC; and together with his neurosurgical colleague Dr. Gordon Thompson, established the Epilepsy Surgery Program. He was much loved by his patients, many of whom he followed for many years. Dr. Wada's contribution to medical science included the publication of 323 peer reviewed papers and 11 medical text books that he edited, together with countless lectures he delivered. He established a research laboratory to assess basic mechanisms of epilepsy, including kindling. He taught medical students and post-graduate residents/fellows from all over the world, who would go on to become successful scientists in epilepsy and neuroscience. He would remain close friends with many of them.

Dr. Wada was President of the American Clinical Neurophysiology Society (1985) and President of the American Epilepsy Society (1989). He was honoured by his medical colleagues with numerous awards including the CLAE Wilder Penfield Gold Medal Award (1988, 2007), AES Founders Award (1998), ACNS Herbert Jasper Award (2001), and the Lifetime Achievement Award (2013) from the International League Against Epilepsy and International Bureau for Epilepsy. He received a Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, by UBC (2003), and the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal (2002) and Diamond Jubilee Medal (2012). He was inducted into the VGH-UBC Hospital Hall of Honour in 2019. Dr. Wada was named an Officer of the

Order of Canada (1992) and received the Order of the Sacred Treasure from the Emperor and Empress of Japan (1995).

On a personal note, we had the great privilege of training under Dr. Wada; but it has been an even greater privilege to have been able to have lunch with him every few months following his retirement. He had kept up with epilepsy literature and was always interested to learn of advances in the epilepsy clinic. Our greatest delight, however, was when Dr Wada would share stories: of his early experience in Japan or his time in the US and at the MNI, or of his sabbatical in Marseilles. It was this sabbatical which resulted in an Aristotelian trigger, as he would put it, for him an unleashing of artistic expression through painting, the creation of his lovely back garden, and the trials and tribulations of learning the piano at 90. Some of you may recognize his paintings in the cards he sent, or the maple leaf, his signature included with his correspondence. Latterly, we have gotten to know his daughter Eileen and his son Kent.

The recent establishment of the Dr Juhn Wada Lecture at the annual meeting of the CLAE was greatly appreciated by Dr. Wada and his family. We will continue to honour his legacy.

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