

Archives
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LEONARD COOK CAREER SUMMARY

Dr. Leonard Cook is one of the world's leading psychopharmacologists. Dr. Cook is recognized as the discoverer of several early drugs for psychiatric disorders and as a pioneer in the development of methods to identify and study drugs for treatment in psychiatry. He is credited for his role in the establishment of the modern field of psychopharmacology. Dr. Leonard Cook was born in Newark, NJ, in 1924. His college career at Rutgers University was interrupted as he served as a celestial navigator in the Army Air Force during the Second World War. He subsequently graduated Rutgers University and then attended Yale Medical School where he earned his Ph.D. in pharmacology in 1951.



Dr. Cook is recognized as the first pharmacologist in the United States, in 1952, to study and elucidate the pharmacological properties of chlorpromazine, a research chemical compound he requested from the French chemical company Rhone Poulenc. His research on chlorpromazine played a significant role in its acceptance for initial clinical evaluation. This agent eventually became the “breakthrough” agent (Thorazine) for the therapy of schizophrenia. Dr. Cook's early publications in this field established the utility of laboratory animal behavior procedures for the evaluation of chemical agents for pharmacological therapy in mental disease.

In recognition of these early and significant contributions in the field of neuropsychopharmacology, the Collegium International of Neuropsychopharmacology (CINP) society awarded him their coveted “Pioneer Award” in 2006. In the same year, the American Society of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET) presented to him their “Lifetime Achievement Award”, recognizing his early and continuous contributions to this field.

Dr. Cook’s initial research was carried out at the Philadelphia laboratories of Smith Kline & French in the early 1950’s, where his research team also researched and developed “Compazine” and “Stelazine.” In addition, his team discovered a compound for depression, a mono amine oxidase inhibitor, “Parnate.” These compounds had a significant impact in the therapy of psychiatric disorders in the 1950s and 1960s. Dr. Cook presented some of this research at the first meeting of the CINP in Rome in 1957. Following his lecture at this Rome meeting, Dr. Cook and a few psychiatrists were invited by Pope Pius XII to visit him at the Vatican’s summer palace at Castle Gondolfo. The Pope was concerned that these newer “drugs” might provide a “false sense of nirvana” in the general population. The Pope expressed the Vatican’s preferred approach to a sense of tranquility as requiring disciplined lifestyle, and agonizing self-discipline.

Dr. Cook’s research group was internationally recognized as the largest and most prominent behavioral pharmacology research laboratory in the world, visited by international scientists, including many from the former Soviet Union where he was referred to as the “American Pavlov.” Many of his early psychopharmacological procedures became standard techniques around the world to identify compounds for psychiatric treatment, especially in many other drug company laboratories.

As the early anti-anxiety drugs were in evaluation, he showed the significant differences between the pharmacological properties of the antipsychotics (e.g., Thorazine) and the early anxiolytics (Miltown, Valium).

In 1969, he left his position at Smith Kline & French to accept the offer as Director of Pharmacology at Hoffmann La Roche drug company to lead their entire pharmacological research department. He particularly focused in the research for new drugs in the field of anxiety to follow their initial agents of Librium and Valium. In subsequent years, several new agents in that field were discovered and entered clinical usage.

Throughout his career, Dr. Cook studied compounds that would enhance certain brain functions. He called these “cognitive enhancers.” He postulated that such agents would have benefits in conditions of mental deterioration, for example, Alzheimer’s disease and senility. He also organized some of the first scientific meetings to discuss “mental performance enhancers.”

In 1982, Dr. Cook was elected as President of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP). He was a founding member of this group (1961) and was the first industrial scientist to serve as President in this prestigious organization. He also received this society’s prestigious “Paul Hoch Award.”

In 1983, DuPont de Nemours company decided to enter the pharmaceutical business and to set up a research wing in their Wilmington, Delaware Experimental Station center. Dr. Cook was invited to lead their research in the Central Nervous System area. He joined them and helped build their laboratory effort in this research area. While at the DuPont laboratories, among several novel research compounds identified, his

group discovered agents for the potential treatment of Alzheimer's disease and which entered clinical trials. Dr. Cook retired in 1992 from DuPont.

During his research career, Dr. Cook also received numerous academic appointments. He was adjunct professor of pharmacology at New Jersey School of Medicine, adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania in psychiatry, and adjunct professor of Pharmacology at Temple Medical School. He was also appointed Visiting Professor of Pharmacology at Beijing Medical School, Shanghai School of Medicine, and Xian School of Medicine in China. Dr. Cook lectured in Moscow and Leningrad Schools of Medicine where he was designated as visiting Professor (1964).

Dr. Cook served for many years as a consultant to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, particularly in their pursuit for pharmacological agents useful in treating drug abuse. He also served as a special consultant to the Pentagon.

Dr. Cook is particularly proud of the many young scientists he trained in his neuropsychopharmacology laboratories, several of whom went on to be outstanding in this field.

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