

John Cairns (1922 – 2018)

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) was saddened to learn of the passing of Dr John Cairns, who died on 12 November 2018. Dr Cairns was a greatly appreciated collaborator and supporter of IARC over the course of many years. He was a member of the IARC Scientific Council for four years, from 1978, and also served on and chaired the IARC Postdoctoral Fellowship Selection Committee.

Dr Cairns led the first two-week course on Molecular Biology for Epidemiologists, held in Lyon in July 1986, which had the innovative objective of acquainting epidemiologists with the novel concepts and techniques of molecular biology. He was uniquely qualified to lead that exercise; his lectures and conversations were always remarkable for the seeds of reflection that they invariably planted in the listeners' minds.

Dr Cairns was a physician and molecular biologist who worked at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne (Australia), at the Virus Research Institute in Entebbe (Uganda), and subsequently at the John Curtin School of Medical Research in Canberra (Australia). In 1960–1961, he spent his sabbatical at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (USA) and later served as its director (1963–1968), while continuing his research on DNA replication. In 1972 he was appointed head of the Mill Hill Laboratory of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (United Kingdom) and subsequently was a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health until his retirement in 1991.

Dr Cairns was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1974. His book titled *Cancer: Science and Society* (published in 1978) and the subsequent one titled *Matters of Life and Death: Perspectives on Public Health, Molecular Biology, Cancer, and the Prospects for the Human Race* (published in 1997) reveal his insightful and wide-ranging reflections on science and humanity.