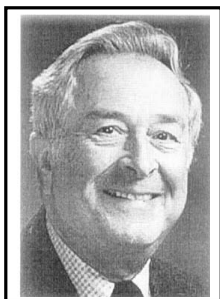


## OBITUARY

### Professor Louis Lasagna (1923–2003)



Louis Lasagna, the so-called ‘Sigmund Freud of Clinical Pharmacology’ and former Dean of Tuft’s University’s Sackler School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences was a pioneer in the field of drug evaluation and clinical pharmacology. Placebo as it means in Latin, I will please, was a verse which was opened for the Vespers for the dead, was rather a religious exercise than a scientific phenomenon; Professor Lasagna was first to propose a scientific basis of the observed results of placebo effect in a landmark scientific paper in the year 1954 (1). Before the work of Lou, as he was called by his peers, scientists and clinicians were aware of the Placebo response but his observations made way for a broader definition of the term and its applications in clinical pharmacology.

Lasagna was instrumental in amending the federal drug approval process by making it a point that pharmaceuticals must undergo a randomized, placebo controlled trial before a product is brought to the consumers. The food, drug and cosmetic act of 1938 in USA which has shaped the FDA towards ‘devoted entirely to safety’ could be considered as an achievement of Lou. He not only devoted his time towards what he considered scientific but also ethical as far as treating a patient is considered. He encouraged that physician develop empathy towards their patients and this encouraged him to write an alternative to the original Hippocratic oath, which to state in part goes: *Above all, I must not play God. I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being* (2). This goes to emphasize the very humane nature of a physician, which was residing in Lou.

Lasagna taught pharmacology and wrote two books, ‘The Doctors’ Dilemma’ (1962) and ‘Life, Death and the Doctor’ (1968).

He was actively involved in the development of medical education and philosophical underpinnings of euthanasia. He criticized drug advertisements and medical fads and he also would not stop to question the gullibility of doctors and news media. He saw the limitations of medicine towards curing a disease and suggested, “to devote more of the energies of man towards improving quality of life, so that it may be joyous, noble or creative. Otherwise, existence is nothing but the bored molecular unwinding a dismal clock”. Thus, despite his busy schedule and extensive travels worldwide, he was extremely attached to his family. He was not only instrumental in reforming clinical pharmacology and medical education, but also was an ‘instrumental person’ in Operas. He died of lymphoma on August 7, 2003, at Newton-Wellsley Hospital in Newton, Massachusetts. He is survived by his wife and seven children.

#### REFERENCES

1. Lasagna L, Mosteller F, Vonfelsing JM, Beecher HK. The mysterious placebo effect. *Am J Medicine* 1954; 16: 770–779.
2. The Hippocratic oath: Modern version. [http://www.pbs.-org-wgbh-nova-doctors-oath\\_modern](http://www.pbs.-org-wgbh-nova-doctors-oath_modern).