Sidney Pestka (1936–2016)

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ON DECEMBER 22, 2016, the International Cytokine and Interferon Society (ICIS) lost with his passing an important member of its family, Sidney “Sid” Pestka. Sid was born in Drobin, Poland. He came to the United States when he was a toddler and resided in Brooklyn, New York, until he was 8 years old. As a child, he moved to New Jersey where he developed his love of science and inventions. Sid attended Princeton University where he graduated summa cum laude, and then went on to the University of Pennsylvania, School of Medicine, where he obtained his MD. Subsequently, he came to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1962, joining the laboratory of Marshall Nirenberg, a future Nobel Laureate, to work on the genetic code and protein synthesis. Then at the National Cancer Institute, he continued his work on the mechanisms of inhibition of protein synthesis by different antibiotics. It was here that Sid first became interested in interferon.

In 1969, he left the NIH and joined the Roche Institute of Molecular Biology. It was here that he began his work on interferon purification and characterization. He and his team were one of the leaders in this area, and this work is still recognized as seminal in the interferon and biotechnology fields. Hoffmann-La Roche was one of the first companies to receive a Food and Drug Administration license in 1986 for the use of interferon alpha 2a (Roferon-A) to treat hairy cell leukemia. Later, interferon alpha was approved to treat hepatitis B and C and several other malignancies.

Sid held the position of Professor and Chairman of the Department of Molecular Genetics, Microbiology, and

Immunology at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School from 1986 to 2011. He ended his career as Emeritus Professor of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School of Rutgers. Sid was named as inventor on 270 patents and had numerous publications. In 1990, he started PBL Assay Science, which today

supports the interferon and cytokine fields with reagents and assay development.

Sid had received many honors and awards, including the National Medal of Technology and the Seymour and Vivian Milstein Award from the International Society for Interferon and Cytokine Research (ISICR) in 2001. He was also the recipient of the Warren Alpert Foundation Prize and the Lemelson-MIT Lifetime Achievement Award.

Sid made many contributions to the ICIS and its predecessors, where he served as Secretary, Vice-President, and President. Sid was instrumental in working with the Milstein family to establish the Milstein Awards for the ISICR and now the ICIS. His strong commitment to ICIS was manifested by sponsoring of the Sidney & Joan Pestka Awards in Interferon Research. The interferon field and its society owe much to Sidney Pestka for his scientific contributions and his dedicated service. He will be missed by his family, friends, and scientific colleagues.