

### ***Merton Bernfield (1939-2002)***

On March 18, 2002 Mert Bernfield died of pneumonia, aggravated by Parkinson's disease he had been suffering from. He was SDB President 1991-92, and editor of "Molecular Basis of Morphogenesis," the Fifty-First Annual Symposium of the Society for Developmental Biology, held at the University of Washington, Seattle in June 1992.



Dr. Bernfield was born in Chicago and received his degrees from the University of Illinois, Urbana (B.S. with honors, 1957) and Chicago (M.S., 1961 and M.D. with highest honors, 1961). He was an intern at the University of Illinois Research and Educational Hospitals in Chicago (1961-62), and he did his pediatrics residency at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center (1962-63). His postdoctoral trainings were at NIH with Marshall Nirenberg (1963-65) and at the University of California, San Diego with Clifford Grobstein (1965-66). He became Chief Resident in Pediatrics at Stanford Medical School (1967), where he climbed the ladder of professorship and remained for 22 years. At Stanford he was also the Josephine Knotts Knowles Professor and Chairman of the Program in Human Biology. In 1989 Mert moved to the East Coast, by becoming the Clement A. Smith Professor of Pediatrics and Professor of Cell Biology at Harvard Medical School, until his untimely death.

The many honors Mert received include the Ross Award in Pediatric Research (1973), MERIT Award from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1988), American Association for Advancement of Sciences Fellowship (1996) and Membership at the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (1996). He also served on many journal editorial boards, academic and scientific review boards, and professional societies boards and committees.

The nature and interactions of cell surface proteoglycans during morphogenesis, tumorigenesis, tissue repair and host defense were a major (but not sole) focus in Mert's research lab throughout the years. The first cloned proteoglycan came from his lab, by Scott Saunders in 1988, and Mert named it "syndecan" by combining "syndein" (to bind together in Greek) with glycan. Recently, work in his lab using transgenic and mutant mice in syndecan expression brought unexpected results, such as misexpression of syndecan may be involved with hypothalamic control of feeding behavior, leading to obesity. Curly tail mouse is a mutant developed in Mert's lab that mimics human neural tube defects and is being used to test human DNA samples with the objective to decipher the genetic basis for these rather frequent birth defect which lead to severe neurological deficiencies.

Mert Bernfield is survived by his wife Audrey, mother Adeline, daughter Susan and son-in-law Claude Millman, sons James and Mark, brother Glen and grandchildren Milo and Beattie Bernfield-Millman.