



## Obituario | Obituary

**Norman R. Farnsworth, 1930-2011**

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Dr. Norman Farnsworth, born 23 March 1930 in Massachusetts, USA, passed away on 10 September 2011 in Chicago, Illinois, USA. Dr. Farnsworth was one of the most outstanding students of medicinal plants of the last century. He was a friend and colleague of many in that field of study.

Norman Farnsworth was drafted into the US Army at age 18 in 1949 and was a veteran of the Korean War. He was seriously wounded and received a number military recognitions. Returning from combat, Norman Farnsworth obtained a degree in pharmacy from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy in 1953 and a PhD in pharmacognosy, the study of drugs from natural origins, from the University of Pittsburgh in 1959. Interestingly, when he completed his doctorate, he was asked to organize a pharmacognosy PhD program at that university and soon after was made the first chair of this new department.

In 1970, Prof. Farnsworth left the University of Pittsburgh for a post in the College of Pharmacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) where he served as Head of the Department of Pharmacognosy and Pharmacology from 1970-1982. At UIC, he was also Research Professor of Pharmacognosy, the Director of the Pharmacognosy Graduate Program, and Director of the World Health Organization Program for Collaborative Research in the Pharmaceutical Sciences – a multidisciplinary program which brought together, for the first time, scientists in numerous fields of medicinal plant research to collaborate on drug discovery from medicinal plants. In 1988, he was named Senior University Scholar at UIC. He held the title of Distinguished Professor of Pharmacognosy, which he

received for his "scholarship, creativity and leadership" from 2001 until his death. During this time he mentored or co-mentored more than 100 PhD, 30 MS students, as well as 30 post-doctoral fellows.

Professor Farnsworth was an internationally-recognized scholar and initiator or co-initiator of many significant projects in the fields of pharmacognosy and medicinal plant research. Among other accomplishments, he was a founding member of the American Society of Pharmacognosy (ASP) in 1959 and a founding member of the Society for Economic Botany (1959). In 1975, Prof. Farnsworth created the NAPAlert (acronym for Natural Products Alert) Database at UIC, the world's first computerized database of ethnobotany, chemistry, pharmacology, toxicology, and clinical trials on medicinal plants. He also was the Principal Investigator and Director of the Botanical Dietary Supplements for Women's Health Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health.

The author or co-author of hundreds of research papers published in peer-reviewed journals, Prof. Farnsworth co-founded the journals *Phytomedicine* and *International Journal of Phytotherapy and Phytopharmacology*. He was a co-founder of the American Botanical Council (ABC). In 2005, the American Society of Pharmacognosy renamed its annual Research Achievement Award in honor of Prof. Farnsworth and in the same year ABC established its Norman R. Farnsworth Excellence in Botanical Research Award. In 2010, UIC established the Norman R. Farnsworth Professor in Pharmacognosy Endowed Professorship. Professor

Farnsworth was the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees including the SEB's Distinguished Economic Botanist Award in 1983.

Norm Farnsworth was rarely seen without his trademark Marsh-Wheeling cigars, even long after he was forced to give up smoking. He was highly-respected and admired. Often seen as brash and outspoken, Norm Farnsworth encouraged his students and all those around him to strive to the highest degree of academic and professional excellence. Underneath the rough exterior was a man seen by his colleagues and students as extraordinarily generous and supportive. He was like a father figure to many former PhD students and post-docs, who constitute a 'family' of medicinal plant researchers now working in many institutions around the world. No matter how busy he was, he would always take time to talk to students and colleagues. Certainly all who knew him realized that he was a truly outstanding scientist. However, he was also a colleague and valuable friend to many and he will be greatly missed in the future.

Based on: Press Release, American Botanical Council, Austin, Texas, September 12, 2011.