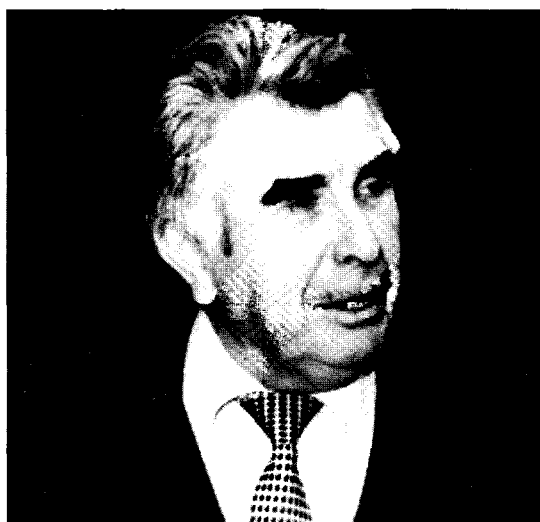


## *In memoriam* Professor Mario Penna, MD

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Professor Mario Penna, MD  
1924-1994

***In memoriam*** Mario Penna. Born in Ovalle, Chile, February 12, 1924. MD, University of Chile. Professor of Pharmacology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Chile. Chairman, Department of Pharmacology; Director, Department of Experimental Medicine, Eastern Division, University of Chile. President, Latin American Association of Pharmacology. Member of the Advisory Committee of this journal, under its previous name of "Archivos de Biología y Medicina Experimentales", between 1966 and 1987. Deceased in Santiago, Chile, June 25, 1994.

**Key terms:** cardiovascular research, *in memoriam*, Mario Penna, pharmacology.

On June 25, 1994, I had the sad experience of witnessing the demise of Dr Mario Penna, my professor and dear friend. For many years he had been trying bravely to fight off a gastrointestinal cancer. As a Medical Doctor, he knew quite well the bad prognosis of his disease. He hoped against hope supported always by his great Christian faith and the profound love for his family and many friends. Only when his work capacity was

quite diminished did he fail to attend to the laboratory. During all that time, we used to chat for hours about our research projects and—despite the sad circumstances—he gave us a remarkable lesson in personal courage and fortitude. Today, I miss those conversations, but I am happy to have been his pupil, associate and good friend.

In 1948, Prof Penna started his long academic career devoted completely to

science. First, in what was named the "Cathedral", which later became the Department of Pharmacology of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Chile, where he remained all his life, with the exception of his stay in foreign universities. Being myself a Fellow Instructor in Pathophysiology, I used to visit him in the old building that had been previously the "St Vincent of Paul Hospital", where his laboratory was located. It was interesting to watch him while he performed his experiments on cardiac pharmacology, as well as asking his opinion and advice about my experiments or, simply, talking to him while he worked. He was not only a good talker, but he had a very sharp mind and was able to listen patiently and sympathetically. I still remember his amusing stories about his teaching experience told with great enthusiasm and continuously interrupted by his contagious laughter, during our lunch time in "La Laurita" cafeteria.

His personal traits, his creativity and vast knowledge of cardiovascular pharmacology attracted numerous young researchers to work in his laboratory, many of whom became later his associates. Some of them are presently professors in foreign universities, particularly in Latin American countries. With financial support from national and international sources, he published many scientific articles, chapters of books, and books on several topics of his main research: the cardiovascular pharmacology. Some of his most cited papers refer to the cardio-stimulatory action of hypoxia, the role of adrenergic activity in the pathogenesis of ventricular fibrillation, the effects of anti-arrhythmic drugs, the mechanism of action of cardiac glucosides, the effects of ethanol on myocardial contraction and on cardio-respiratory reflexes.

He was awarded twice the Kellogg Foundation fellowship for postdoctoral studies in Cornell and Pennsylvania Universities, and later he was awarded NIH and OPS fellowships. He was well known in the academic media and gained international recognition receiving invitations to participate in International Symposia, Conferences, Editorial Committees and organization of international scientific meetings. He became

a counselor of the International Society for Heart Research.

He served diverse academic and administrative posts in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Chile. Among others, Chairman of the Department of Pharmacology and Director of the Department of Experimental Medicine, on the Eastern Campus of the University.

Despite his academic success, his modesty was commendable. He was a scientist without pretence, behaving with moderation, but being always very strict with the academic work. The few times I saw him losing his temper were due to the lack of commitment to work of one of his associates. He loved his laboratory work above all and, at the end of his days, he felt sorry for being incapable of carrying out his experiments. During the organization of the XIVth Latin American Congress of Pharmacology, of which he was the President –and being already critically ill– he was permanently concerned about every administrative detail. Right before his death, when his faculties were extremely debilitated, he told me: "It is necessary to take good care of the foreign guests and meet them at the airport". But, in the end, he did not survive to attend the Congress.

His life was devoted to his family, his friends, the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile, and his research and teaching on Pharmacology. One of the best attributes of Dr Penna was that he combined a bright intelligence, an outstanding career and exacting qualities, with a genuine kindness and warmth, a very unusual combination to find nowadays in the scientific community. Those of us who knew him well, were lucky enough to learn from him a lot more than just cardiovascular pharmacology.

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