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To cite this article: (2003) Monroe Elliot Wall (1916–2002), *Pharmaceutical Biology*, 41:sup1, 2-3, DOI: [10.1080/1388020039051736](https://doi.org/10.1080/1388020039051736)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1388020039051736>



Published online: 20 Oct 2008.



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Monroe E. Wall
(July 25, 1916–July 6, 2002)

In memoriam

Monroe E. Wall, Ph.D., a dedicated and passionate scientist whose discoveries illustrated the potential of natural products as sources for novel cancer therapeutics, died of heart and kidney failure on July 6, 2002 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Dr. Wall and his long-time colleague and friend, Mansukh C. Wani, Ph.D., are credited as co-discoverers of the anticancer compounds Taxol[®], from the Pacific yew tree (*Taxus brevifolia* Nutt., Taxaceae), and camptothecin[™], from xi shu or “happy tree” (*Camptotheca acuminata* Decne., Cornaceae).¹ These compounds have redefined anticancer chemotherapy, not only by leading to effective, life-prolonging, treatments, but also, by uncovering unique, and previously unknown, mechanisms of actions by which to target the uncontrolled cycle of cancer cell proliferation. This research team has won many prestigious awards for these discoveries, but Dr. Wall was always most proud of the letters of gratitude he would receive from strangers whose lives had been touched by these compounds.

Dr. Wall earned his BS, MS and Ph.D. degrees from Rutgers University in the late 1930s, and soon thereafter he joined the Eastern Regional Laboratory of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He worked on many interesting projects throughout his nearly 20 year career there, including searching for alternative sources of rubber during WWII, an assignment that was so essential to the war effort, it prevented him from being drafted. His research group spent much of the

1950s in the pursuit of phytosteroids that could serve as precursors of cortisone, and fortuitously, he saved all of the more than 1000 plant extracts they examined. At the request of the late NCI pioneer, Dr. Jonathan Hartwell, aliquots of these were examined for anticancer activity by the National Cancer Institute, and one of them, *Camptotheca acuminata*, showed particular promise.

The USDA was not supportive of his desire to pursue the anticancer activity of *C. acuminata*, and, thus, he joined the then new Research Triangle Institute in 1960. In doing so, he founded RTI's chemistry programs, and served as its first leader for over 20 years. Under his guidance, this portion of the organization grew to over 200 people, working in programs as diverse as environmental chemistry, mass spectrometry, drug and xenobiotic metabolism, synthetic medicinal chemistry, radiochemistry, toxicology, and of course, natural products chemistry. After stepping down as Vice President in 1983, he continued to direct the RTI Natural Products Laboratory and, with his colleague Dr. Wani, led natural product drug discovery and herbal medicine research projects funded by the NCI National Coopera-

¹ Taxol[®], a word coined by Dr. Wall, is a registered trademark of Bristol-Myers Squibb. Camptothecin[™] is a trademark of the Research Triangle Institute.

tive Drug Discovery Group (NCDDG) program and the National Toxicology Program (NTP), among others, exemplifying his persistence and lifelong dedication to scientific discovery, he came to the laboratory on a regular basis, even at nearly 86 years old, up until 2 weeks prior to his death.

Many of the people he hired and mentored as young scientists are now leaders in their respective fields. One of these

commented that the ‘Monroe Wall Doctrine’ was to get good people, support them with good facilities, do good science, work hard, and keep doing it. His contributions as a prolific scientist, as a visionary leader, as a demanding mentor and as a loyal friend, will be sorely missed.

Nicholas H. Oberlies, Ph.D. and David J. Kroll, Ph.D.
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Institute.