

In Memoriam

Judah Folkman

1933–2008

Moses Judah Folkman, MD—perhaps best known for his pioneering research into anti-angiogenic therapy to treat cancers—died on January 14, 2008. Dr. Folkman contributed substantially to other areas of medicine, including the field of cardiology.

Judah Folkman was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on February 24, 1933. As a small boy, he would accompany his father, a rabbi, to visit hospitalized patients. Excited by those experiences, young Judah told his father that he wanted to be a doctor, rather than a rabbi as family tradition would dictate. His father responded, “So, you can be a rabbi-like doctor.”¹

Dr. Folkman graduated cum laude in 1953 from The Ohio State University and magna cum laude in 1957 from Harvard Medical School. During the course of his academic studies, he won the Soma Weiss Award, the Boylston Medical Prize, and the Borden Undergraduate Research

Award in Medicine. He completed an internship and residency in surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston (1957–1960), served at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy (1960–1962), and in 1964, at age 34, was appointed Chief Resident in Surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Early in his professional career, Dr. Folkman published papers^{2,3} regarding the use of an “endocrine pacemaker” in the treatment of complete heart block.

Concomitantly with his professorship at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Folkman was Surgeon-in-Chief at Children’s Hospital in Boston. His experimental work suggested that one may keep tumors in check by choking off the blood supply that they need in order to grow and spread. In 1971, he published a seminal paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, in which he proposed that all tumor growth depends on angiogenesis.⁴ Dr. Folkman’s laboratory purified the first angiogenic protein from a tumor, discovered the first angiogenesis inhibitors, and began clinical trials of anti-angiogenic therapy. Today, angiogenesis inhibitors have U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval for the treatments of cancer and macular degeneration.

Dr. Folkman wrote or co-wrote approximately 400 papers and more than 100 book chapters. He was conferred honorary degrees by 15 universities, and he received dozens of awards from professional societies and national academies. Of special note, he was elected to the National Academy of Science, The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science.

Judah Folkman was a visionary medical scientist who, on a daily basis, inspired and encouraged younger scientists and physicians in their own work. In doing so, he fulfilled his father’s wish that he become a rabbi-like doctor. His pioneering research and



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(Photograph by Jon Chase,
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experimentation led to remarkable advances in cardiology and other fields of medicine. He will be greatly missed.

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References

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