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**ETHNIC DIFFERENCES
IN REACTIONS TO
DRUGS AND XENOBIOTICS**

**EDITORS: Werner Kalow
H. Werner Goedde
Dharam P. Agarwal**

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ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN REACTIONS TO DRUGS AND XENOBIOTICS

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Editors

Werner Kalow

Department of Pharmacology
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

H. Werner Goedde

and

Dharam P. Agarwal

Institute of Human Genetics

University of Hamburg
Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany

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ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN REACTIONS TO DRUGS AND XENOBIOTICS

Contributors

Steve Adkins, Department of Pharmacology, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI 48109 [87]

Dharam P. Agarwal, Institute of Human Genetics, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany [xv, 99, 113]

Gunnar Alván, Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Karolinska Institute, Huddinge University Hospital, S-141 86 Huddinge, Sweden [345]

Karl E. Anderson, New York Medical College, Valhalla, NY [39]

Riad A-L. Bayoumi, Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Khartoum, Khartoum, Sudan [87]

Leif Bertilsson, Department of Pharmacology of the Karolinska Institute, Huddinge University Hospital, S-141 86 Huddinge, Sweden [169]

B. Bondy, Psychiatric Hospital, University of Munich, Nussbaumstr. 7, D-8000 Munich 2, Federal Republic of Germany [357]

Allan H. Conney, The Roche Institute of Molecular Biology, Nutley, NJ [39]

Diane Wilson Cox, Research Institute of the Hospital for Sick Children and Departments of Paediatrics, Medical Genetics and Medical Biophysics, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada M5G 1X8 [373]

M. Eichelbaum, Dr. Margarete Fischer-Bosch-Institut für Klinische Pharmakologie, Auerbachstr. 112, 7000 Stuttgart 50, Federal Republic of Germany [157, 207]

David A. Price Evans, Department of Medicine, Riyadh Armed Forces Hospital, PO Box 7897, Riyadh 11159, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [207, 209, 491]

Gebhard Flatz, Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, Konstanty-Gutschow-Straße 8, 3000 Hannover 61, Federal Republic of Germany [55]

K.A. Fletcher, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Pembroke Place, Liverpool L3 5QA, England [261]

Edward D. Freis, Department of Hypertension, VA Medical Center, Washington, DC 20422 [313]

Waltraut Friedl, Institute of Human Genetics, University of Bonn, D 5300 Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany [367]

The number in brackets is the opening page number of the contributor's article.

H. Werner Goedde, Institute of Human Genetics, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany [xv, 9, 99, 113]

Karl-Heinz Grzeschik, Institut für Humangenetik der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität, D-44 Münster, Federal Republic of Germany [479]

Johannes Hebebrand, Institute of Human Genetics, University of Bonn, D 5300 Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany [367]

Friedrich Heubel, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Marburg, School of Medicine, D-3550 Marburg, West Germany [471]

Eigill F. Hvidberg, Department of Clinical Pharmacology, University Hospital, 9 Blegdamsvej, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark [279]

T. Inaba, Department of Pharmacology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, Toronto M5S 1A8, Canada [139]

P.R. Jackson, Department of Therapeutics, University of Sheffield, The Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield S10 2JF, United Kingdom [413]

Anil K. Jaiswal, Laboratory of Developmental Pharmacology, NICHD, NIH, Bethesda, MD 20892 [453]

Werner Kalow, Department of Pharmacology, Medical Sciences Building, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A8, Canada [xv, 3, 207, 243, 331, 547]

Attallah Kappas, The Rockefeller University, New York, NY [39]

Richard E. Kouri, Advanced Research Section, International Biotechnologies, Inc., New Haven, CT 06511 [453]

B.N. La Du, Department of Pharmacology, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI 48109 [87]

M.S. Lennard, Department of Therapeutics, University of Sheffield, The Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield S10 2JF, United Kingdom [413]

Klaus-Ulrich Lentjes, Institute of Human Genetics, University of Bonn, D 5300 Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany [367]

Lucio Luzzatto, Department of Haematology, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Ducane Road, London W12 0HS [385]

J.L. Maggs, Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Liverpool, Liverpool L69 3BX, United Kingdom [289]

N. Matussek, Psychiatric Hospital, University of Munich, Nussbaumstr. 7, D-8000 Munich 2, Federal Republic of Germany [207, 357]

Theodore McLemore, Developmental Therapeutics Program, Division of Cancer Treatment, NCI, NIH, Bethesda, MD 20892 [453]

Daniel W. Nebert, Laboratory of Developmental Pharmacology, NICHD, NIH, Bethesda, MD 20892 [453]

Masatoshi Nei, Center for Demographic and Population Genetics, University of Texas at Houston, Houston, TX 77225 [21]

Karl J. Netter, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Marburg, School of Medicine, D-3550 Marburg, West Germany [471]

Monica Nordberg, Department of Environmental Hygiene, Karolinska Institute, P.O. Box 60400, S104 01 Stockholm, Sweden [401]

David T. Okpako, Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria [59]

Gilbert S. Omenn, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195 [207, 527, 563]

B.K. Park, Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Liverpool, Liverpool L69 3BX, United Kingdom [289, 547]

A.H. Price, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Pembroke Place, Liverpool L3 5QA, England [261]

Peter Propping, Institute of Human Genetics, University of Bonn, D 5300 Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany [367, 547]

F. Clifford Rose, Academic Unit of Neuroscience, Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School, London W6 8RF [323]

Naruya Saitou, Center for Demographic and Population Genetics, University of Texas at Houston, Houston, TX 77225 [21]

Otto Schaefer, Northern Medical Research Unit, Medical Services, Health and Welfare Canada, 7904-135 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5R 0B5 [77]

Folke Sjöqvist, Department of Clinical Pharmacology of the Karolinska Institute, Huddinge University Hospital, S-141 86 Huddinge, Sweden [169, 207]

Christian Steffen, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Marburg, School of Medicine, D-3550 Marburg, West Germany [471]

Siu W. Tang, Departments of Psychiatry and Pharmacology, University of Toronto, 250 College Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 1R8 [303]

G.T. Tucker, Department of Therapeutics, University of Sheffield, The Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield S10 2JF, United Kingdom [413, 547]

Elliot S. Vesell, Department of Pharmacology, The Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, Hershey, PA 17033 [207, 425, 547]

H.F. Woods, Department of Therapeutics, University of Sheffield, The Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield S10 2JF, United Kingdom [413]

N.M. Woolhouse, Department of Biochemistry, University of Ghana Medical School, P.O. Box 4236, Accra, Ghana [189, 207]

Preface

Many efficacious and selective drugs have become available since the mid-century. Their therapeutic use led to an increased awareness of individual differences in drug response; thus, about three decades ago, the interdisciplinary science of pharmacogenetics was born. This was followed by observations of interindividual variation in toxic response to industrial chemicals and environmental contaminants; these observations gave rise to the term "ecogenetics." At the same time, enzyme induction and adaptive processes were increasingly identified as non-genetic sources of pharmacological and toxicological variation. The occupation with variation in response to, or metabolism of, drugs and other chemicals initially concerned mainly individuals, that is to say, variation within a population was the center of interest. In recent years, it became clear that there are also differences between ethnically distinct populations in susceptibility to the effects of drugs and chemicals. This is a topic that—in spite of its medical significance—so far had never been thoroughly reviewed. This volume represents an attempt to remedy this deficiency.

The contents of this volume consist of the progress report of a Conference entitled "Ethnic Differences in Reactions to Drugs and Other Xenobiotics", held on October 3–6, 1985, at the resort town Titisee in the Black Forest of West Germany. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the recommendations of Dr. G.S. Omenn at the early planning stage of this conference, and suggestions of Dr. E.S. Vesell and Dr. D.D. Breimer which affected its final design. The conference was made possible by the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds. To this foundation, its Director, Dr. med. H. Schroeder, and to its staff, go our sincere thanks. The foundation did not only provide the necessary financial support but also organizational and administrative help. Dr. Schroeder deserves special thanks; his personal interest and suggestions made participation in this Conference a particular pleasure; it was the 50th Conference he had held.

W. Kalow
H. Werner Goedde
Dharam P. Agarwal

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Ethnic Differences in Reactions to Drugs and Xenobiotics: Introductory Information

OUTLOOK OF A PHARMACOLOGIST

W. Kalow
Department of Pharmacology,
Medical Sciences Building,
University of Toronto,
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A8.

The observation and interpretation of differences are the main springs of science. The subject of this conference are differences between human populations, difference which are, or did become, visible only on exposure to pharmacologic or toxic agents. A few examples have been known for many years, such as the drug-induced hemolysis of G-6-PD deficiencies in some but not all populations, or the scarcity of slow acetylators of isoniazid among - for instance - the Inuit (Eskimos) in comparison with Caucasians. Additional observations made during the last few years indicated that we can no longer take for granted an equal response to a given drug or chemical in all population. This realization leads to a number of questions: How frequent and of what kind are interethnic differences in drug response? Do they offer novel starting points for fundamental investigations? Are they of immediate clinical significance or of importance for drug development? In order to find answers to these questions it appears worthwhile to provide at this conference, first, a survey and evaluation of such differences already known. In other words, one purpose of this conference is to take stock of recorded ethnic differences in the pharmacological or toxicological response to chemicals. Second, a series of papers at this conference, and the discussions, are hoped to provide some guidance for future investigation.

Please allow me to give a personal account of the development of my interest in the topic of this conference. Early in my career as a pharmacologist, I noticed that the

chemical structures of a series of drugs determined the magnitude of response variation among rats (Kalow, 1949). It was therefore always clear to me that it is worthwhile to look for biological rules when confronted with pharmacological or toxicological variation. Later, when studying cholinesterase, I found genetic variants of that enzyme which affected the actions of the drug succinylcholine (Kalow, 1956), a finding that brought me into a field which we now call pharmacogenetics (Kalow, 1962). Several years later, I decided deliberately to commence investigations into the variability of human drug metabolism. The subjects of investigations were frequently students and staff of the University of Toronto. To make understandable what follows, I have to digress. Toronto was after the 2nd world war a city of 600,000 inhabitants. Metropolitan Toronto today houses 2.1 million, and the surrounding area along Lake Ontario is home to many millions more. The largest single ethnic group in Toronto is no longer Anglo-Saxon but is Italian. Toronto harbors one of the largest Chinese communities in North America; street names around the University are shown in English and Chinese. There are many other Ethnic groups. Much of this ethnic diversity is reflected in staff and students of the University. When we asked for volunteers for drug metabolizer studies, the responders were naturally an ethnically mixed group. We generally recorded the volunteers by the University - assigned student number, not by student name. When testing the metabolites of amobarbital, we decided to recall for re-investigation some students whose metabolite pattern differed from the average (Kalow et al., 1979); I gave to a colleague the student numbers of those to be re-invited, and to our surprise, they all turned out to be of Chinese origin. A similar situation recurred later when we investigated debrisoquine.

Thus, the crucial factor in this chain of events was the large post-war migration with its resulting mix of people of distinct origins. The second factor was my interest in variation and population differences through my (previous) occupation with pharmacogenetics. However, our observations could not be readily analysed in terms of genetics or of the environmental factors represented by diet and lifestyles. The data did not lend themselves to twin or family studies. There were too few mixed marriages, and ethnicity and diet were confounded. Many