

William Schlaepfer, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

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DEATHS

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William W. Schlaepfer, an emeritus professor of pathology and laboratory medicine in the Perelman School of Medicine, died on June 20. He was 92.

Dr. Schlaepfer received his BA in biology from Princeton University in 1954 and then earned his MD from Yale University Medical School in 1958, where he conducted a doctoral thesis on Alzheimer Type 2 astrocytes during experimental ammonium intoxication in rats. He completed his training at the Max Planck Institut für Psychiatrie in Munich, Germany, becoming interested in the ultrastructure of peripheral nerves and the nature of the axonal cytoskeleton. He continued his experimental studies on peripheral nerves as a staff neuropathologist at the medical schools of Cornell and Washington Universities, where he introduced teased fiber analyses of nerve biopsies to differentiate between demyelinating and axonal neuropathies and for semiquantitative assessment of Wallerian degeneration.

William Schlaepfer

After spending a year at the University of Cambridge on a Research Career Development Award and then serving as a member of the Path A and Neuro B National Institutes of Health (NIH) Study Sections, Dr. Schlaepfer joined Penn's faculty in 1979. Recruited as a professor in the department of pathology and laboratory medicine in the School of Medicine, he held this appointment until retiring in 2014. His research at Penn focused on peripheral nerve disease, and his laboratory specialized in the biochemical and molecular properties of neurofilament (NF) proteins, and explored mechanisms through which the disruption of NF assembly and aggregation of light neurofilament proteins led to motor neuron degeneration and disease.

Dr. Schlaepfer's research was published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* and the *Journal of Neuropathology & Experimental Neurology*, among other peer-reviewed publications. From 1986-1987, Dr. Schlaepfer served as president of the American Association of Neuropathologists.

"While always attendant to his research laboratory, he shared fully in the teaching, training and service of academic neuropathology," said his colleagues when he received a lifetime achievement award from the American Association of Neuropathologists in 2011. "He was rewarded by many close and fruitful interactions with scores of very talented residents and fellows whom he trained during the years. Bill serves as a role model for many of us that aspire to follow in his steps, that is, an almost 50-year record of continuous grant funding, running an active laboratory that spawned such major discoveries, and, at the same time, excelling in day-to-day surgical neuropathology and teaching the next generation of academic neuropathologists."