

In Memoriam:

Honorary Member, Akihiro Ito, MD., Ph.D., 1938-2017

Dr. Akihiro Ito, who had been popular in Japan by the name of Professor “Hormone”, died from sepsis on August 24 after a long illness.

Dr. Ito was born on January 3, 1938, in Hiroshima prefecture. He graduated from the School of Medicine at Hiroshima University in March of 1962, and received his doctorate from the graduate school of the University in March of 1967. He became a research assistant in April of that year, an assistant professor in January of 1968, and an associate professor in July of 1975, at the Research Institute for Radiation Biology and Medicine of Hiroshima University. In August of 1975, he was appointed a head of Second Histopathology Laboratory, Department of Pathology, National Cancer Center Research Institute. In April of 1978, he returned to the Research Institute for Radiation Biology and Medicine of Hiroshima University as an associate professor, and was promoted to be a professor in April of the next year. He retired in March of 2001, and received the title of Professor Emeritus in April of the same year. From April of 2001 to March of 2007, he served as director of Medical Corporation Kouwa-Kai Ushita Bara-en, a long-term care health facility for the elderly. I heard that Dr. Ito was nicknamed “hormone” for his energetic nature developed by eating “hormone-yaki”, a local food of the Western Japan. But there is another opinion that the nickname came from the fact that Dr. Ito did the research under the theme of the involvement of hormone in carcinogenesis. Indeed, Dr. Ito was successful in establishing a cell culture line (MtT/F34 strain) for pituitary hormone neoplasms, and the title of his retirement lecture was “Hormones and cancer.” Dr. Ito helped clarify the relationship between catalase and cancer. If you give hydrogen peroxide to C57BL mice, which have low levels of catalase, they develop duodenal tumors. However, C3H mice, which have high catalase levels, do not develop tumors by the administration of hydrogen peroxide. Meanwhile, F1 strains like B6C3F1 and C3B6F1 mice develop tumors at about half the rate of C57BL mice, while acatalasemic, namely catalase-deficient, mice establish high rates of cancer. Dr. Ito also developed the novel technique of visualizing tumors with alkaline phosphatase.

Dr. Ito suggested me to research miso when I returned to Japan from studies in England in 1989. At first I could not figure out why he gave me such a suggestion, but I have done and am still doing the study of miso. I am grateful to Dr. Ito for guiding my research in an unexpected direction that I would not have pursued without him. Even after I left his laboratory, Dr. Ito researched miso’s properties of suppressing the induction of liver tumors by irradiation or carcinogens, as well as that of breast cancers by carcinogenic substances.

Dr. Ito served as the Chairperson for the 10th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Toxicologic Pathology, and it was his idea to give various incentive awards to younger members, a form of encouragement that is still continuing to this day. He contributed greatly to the Society, and I’m sure he and other benefactors of the Society who have passed away, such as Drs. Nobuyuki Ito, Yuzo Hayashi, Youichi Konishi, and Tomoyuki Shirai, are all up in heaven vigorously debating the future of the JSTP.

I would like to thank Dr. Ito for all of his contributions to the Society. May he rest in peace.

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