

Dr. Kenneth Neville Wynne (1928–2011)
Foundation Member of the Endocrine Society of Australia
Life Member (1982)

Ken Wynne was a remarkable person, an inaugural member of the Society and an outstanding steroid chemist. Ken graduated with an MSc in 1953, and learned his fundamental scientific skills at a CSIRO agricultural station in Prospect on the outskirts of Western Sydney. He moved into cancer research at the NSW Cancer Council in Randwick and was pretty much set on spending his life as a clinical chemist until his mother won the Opera House lottery and asked Ken what he would really like to do. His reply was a PhD at Cambridge, and so off they went to investigate 16β hydroxy DHEA for three years, punt on the river Cam and tour the capitals of Europe in a style to which they had suddenly become accustomed. Plan A accomplished (graduating in 1973), they returned to Australia, and settled in an apartment in Spring Street, in central Melbourne. Ken worked with Jim Stockigt, Chen-Fee Lim, John Barlow and me for many years, on grants but never on edge. He was slight, always cheerful, helpful and ready to assist those flummoxed by steroid nomenclature or structure. In the latter half of his career his understanding of the chemistry of small molecules was to become enormously useful in studies of an eclectic array of unlikely signalling molecules such as coffee-derived opiates, ginseng and neomycin as well as more mainstream thyroxine, fatty acids and common diuretics.

He was a creature of habit, some of which were bacon, eggs, toast and marmalade every morning, three or four scotches on reaching home, and a bottle of red wine ('Mother doesn't drink') each evening with dinner. This led to an early coronary, probably helped by heavy smoking, and despite the onyx cigarette holder; I can vividly remember the reverential tones in which Jim Stockigt recounted his dietary habits, on learning about them post-coronary. Fortunately, he fell into the hands of those who preach moderation in all things, gave up smoking, cut down to one egg a day and made healthier food choices at the Victoria market every Saturday morning.

When I think of Ken I remember what must appear to be silly, trivial things. He drove a superbly maintained Citroen DS 17, the streamlined epitome of French elegance. He undertook that I could have first dibs if he ever let it go; when he did, he had forgotten, and I had three children of driving age and four equivalently aged Peugeot 504s, and thus in no position to reproach him. At the end of one NHMRC interview, when asked if I had any questions, I gently reminded the Chair 'Cres, you do realize that if this grant goes down, it will be a no Wynne situation?' (the grant got up).

We are all the same, and each one of us is unique. I have never met anybody who even faintly resembled Ken, before or after we worked together. Many people I know share his qualities: but there was about him, in grey slacks, mid-blue Fair Isle sweater and a tweed sports coat a totally unlikely touch of the exotic - the lottery, Cambridge, Spring Street (say, Macquarie Street for those to the north), sparkling Citroen - all sat unusually easily on him. The society has lost one of its founding members; may he rest in peace.

Professor John W. Funder (Former ESA President and ESA Life Member)



Figure 1 (top) Ken Wynne with NSW Premier Cahill at the opening of the NSW Cancer Council Laboratory at the prince of Wales Hospital, Sydney, 1956.

Figure 2 (middle) Ken Wynne working in the NSW Cancer Council Laboratory (1956)