molecular oral microbiology

Tribute

Michael 'Mike' Martin, who died unexpectedly on 22 February 2011 at age 37 years, had emerged as a towering figure in the field of innate immunity. Mike's ground-breaking work focused on the molecular mechanisms controlling inflammation. He is, perhaps, most renowned for his seminal discoveries delineating the role of glycogen synthase kinase-3 in dictating the balance of pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokine production in response to bacterial infection.

Mike Martin

Mike became interested in science fairly late in his formal education. However, he displayed a remarkable aptitude for microbiology, graduating *summa cum laude* from Eastern Washington University. Deciding to pursue a PhD, Mike was accepted into the doctoral program in the Department of Microbiology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), home to the world-leading Mucosal Immunology group. His doctoral work with Michael Russell highlighted several novel aspects of the generation and regulation of mucosal immune responses, and he won both the AADR and IADR Hatton Awards for junior investigators in 2000. Following his doctoral studies, Mike chose to stay at UAB, first as a postdoctoral fellow with Sue Michalek and then rapidly transitioning to the faculty ranks as an Assistant Professor. During this time Mike's work took on more of an oral flavor and he began the molecular dissection of the recognition and responses of immune cells to the lipopolysaccharide of *Porphyromonas gingivalis*. In 2005 Mike was recruited to the newly formed research group in Oral Health and Systemic Disease at the University of Louisville, where he developed his ideas on the underlying cellular mechanisms that regulate qualitative and quantitative aspects of the host's inflammatory response. Numerous papers in high impact journals and multiple extramural grant funding soon followed. At the time of his tragic death Mike was exploring the role of JAK2 as a central kinase controlling Toll-like receptor-2-mediated inflammation in *P. gingivalis*-stimulated innate immune cells; research likely to once again change our understanding of the signal transduction events that regulate cytokine expression.

Mike had a famously encyclopedic knowledge and understanding of cytokine networks together with the patience to explain them to the uninitiated. Never a self-promoter, Mike's students and postdocs remember him as a brilliant scientist, a dedicated mentor who worked shoulder to shoulder with them in the laboratory, and most importantly as a close friend. Despite his work ethic, Mike's main priority in life was his family and he was devoted to his wife Jayme and two children, Jack and Clara. He will be sorely missed by his colleagues at the University of Louisville as well as by his comrades and collaborators throughout the oral microbiology and immunology community.

Richard J. Lamont
University of Louisville, USA
E-mail: rich.lamont@louisville.edu