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David Garbers, HHMI Investigator, 1944-2006

David Garbers, a distinguished scientist and an investigator with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute for more than 30 years, died on Tuesday in Dallas where he had been a professor of pharmacology and director of the Cecil H. and Ida Green Center for Reproductive Biology Sciences at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. He was 62.

Garbers devoted his scientific career to the study of reproductive biology, an interest that began during a work-study project in the laboratory of Neal First at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As he told an interviewer not long ago, "By the time I finished my degree, I had no doubts that I wanted to pursue scientific research as my major endeavor in life."

HHMI benefited from Garbers's commitment to research and from his scientific creativity. While at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, he discovered a novel family of receptors on the sperm cells of sea urchins that enable sperm to swim in the right direction. Garbers and his colleagues subsequently found these same receptors in higher organisms, including mammals. More recently, Garbers has identified proteins expressed only on sperm cells, including an ion channel that gives a sperm cell the wiggle it needs to penetrate the egg membrane. His scientific interests also extended to stem cell biology and the development of techniques to grow male germ cells in the laboratory.

Garbers joined HHMI as investigator on July 1, 1976. He was a member of the National Academy of Sciences, as well as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Academy of Medicine, Engineering, and Science of Texas.

Garbers is survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred Garbers of West Salem, Wis.; a daughter, Lesley FitzGerald of McKinney, Texas; a son, Michael Garbers of Lewisville, Texas; two grandchildren, Hailey and Austin;

two sisters, Betty Rhyner of Madison, Wis., and Jeanette Knutson of Poynette, Wis.; and two brothers, Donald Garbers of La Crosse and Randy Garbers of West Salem.