Roy Calne Biography

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Biography

A pioneer in the field of organ transplantation, Roy Calne was born in London, England, in 1930. He studied at Lancing College and then received his M.B. and B.S. from Guy's Hospital Medical School in London. He practiced at Guy's Hospital for one year after qualifying there in 1953, served in the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1954 to 1956, and was then an orthopedic surgeon in Oxford for two years. In 1958 he became a surgeon at the Royal Free Hospital in London.

While doing postgraduate surgical research in London, Calne conducted experimental kidney transplants on dogs, using one of the earliest immunosuppression drugs--drugs that suppress the body's natural immune reaction against transplanted tissue, which causes rejection of the graft. The results were encouraging, and Calne decided to go to the United States to learn more about immunosuppressants and work with other transplant researchers.From 1960 to 1961 Calne was associated with the Harvard Medical School and Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, and with the team there headed by Dr. Joseph Murray that had carried out the first successful human kidney transplant in 1954. Calne and Murray collaborated with future Nobel Laureate George Hitchings (1905-) of Burroughs-Wellcome drug company to develop and test improved immunosuppressants. The result was Imuran, which Calne and Murray found allowed extended survival of dog kidney transplants.

Back in England, Calne was appointed lecturer in surgery first at St. Mary's Hospital in London and then, from 1962 to 1965, at Westminster Hospital. He joined Cambridge University in 1965 as professor of surgery, and later became department head. During these years, he improved the techniques of kidney transplantation and developed ways of transplanting the liver, a complicated organ. He published a standard text on kidney transplantation in 1963. Continuing his interest in immunosuppression, Calne and his junior associate, Dr. David White, carried out animal and then human trials on a new drug supplied to them by the Swiss scientist Jean-Francois Borel of the Sandoz pharmaceutical firm. The trials proved the effectiveness of what came to be the standard drug for suppressing rejection of organ transplants: cyclosporin. Calne was knighted for his achievements in 1981.