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Professor Marlatt's Research Led to Increased Understanding of Addictive Behaviors

March 15, 2011, Seattle, WA—University of Washington College of Arts & Sciences learned yesterday that Professor G. Alan Marlatt, a clinical psychologist whose groundbreaking work in addictive behaviors spanned nearly four decades, passed away on Monday morning, March 14. Marlatt's research had a major impact on understanding the interaction between thoughts, emotions, and situations as predictors of addictive behaviors, such as substance abuse problems.

Marlatt was a full professor and director of the Addictive Behaviors Research Center at the University of Washington (UW). He joined the UW faculty in 1972 and founded the Addictive Behaviors Research Center within the department of Psychology a decade later. He has mentored hundreds of researchers and clinicians in the field of addictive behaviors.

"Alan was one of the reasons I came to the University," stated Ana Mari Cauce, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington. "At mid-career, Alan was already a giant in the field. What really struck me about him was his warmth, generosity, and genuineness. These are the same qualities that drew scores of students – undergraduates, graduates, post-doctoral fellows – to work with him. He cared deeply about their personal, as well as their professional, development. I can think of very few people who managed to wed the personal and professional so seamlessly and in a manner in which one enhanced the other. He was an original and will be missed."

Marlatt worked extensively on the development of programs to prevent and treat addictive behaviors. His approaches were unique and pioneering, as evidenced by the BARLAB (Behavioral Alcohol Research Lab) that he created at the University of Washington – a simulated cocktail lounge that had the look and feel of a neighborhood tavern fully equipped with one-way mirrors and hidden cameras and microphones. He developed innovative procedures such as the "Balanced Placebo Design" that helped scientists examine the separate psychological and physiological effects of substances, such as alcohol, on behavioral outcomes. In one classic study, Marlatt demonstrated that the desired effects from alcohol consumption were not actually due to the alcohol itself, but rather the belief, or expectation, that the beverage contained alcohol.

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His research did more than shed light on the psychological mechanisms that led to and maintained problem drinking and other addictive behaviors. Marlatt's work was influential in developing more efficacious, evidence-based treatment approaches. Early in his career, he developed the cognitive behavioral relapse prevention model which has not only been used to aid the treatment of alcohol abuse, but also a variety of other disorders such as eating disorders and depression. He was a leader in developing effective prevention programs to reduce harmful drinking by college students, and today his Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) approach is widely used on campuses across the nation and internationally. More recently, Marlatt's research focused on the integration of meditation techniques with cognitive behavioral relapse prevention skills to help individuals recognize and cope with common triggers for relapse such as depression, anxiety, or environmental cues.

Marlatt was also a pioneering advocate of harm reduction, which is a pragmatic and humanistic approach to reducing the individual and social harms associated with addictive behaviors. An alternative to "zero-tolerance" or abstinence only approaches, harm reduction seeks to lessen the problems associated with drug use and other high risk behaviors through policies and strategies that recognize the dignity and human rights of those who engage in these behaviors, and support any movement in the direction of reduced harm as steps in the right direction.

During his 40 year career as a clinical and academic psychologist, Marlatt authored 23 books, including *Relapse Prevention* (1985; 2005), *Assessment of Addictive Behaviors* (1988; 2005), *Harm Reduction* (1998), *Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS): A Harm Reduction Approach* (1999), and more than 300 articles and book chapters on the assessment and treatment of addictive behavior.

Prestigious awards for his accomplishments have included the Jellinek Memorial Award for outstanding contributions to knowledge in the field of alcohol studies, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Innovators in Combating Substance Abuse Award, the Distinguished Scientist Award from the American Psychological Association and Lifetime Achievement awards from the Research Society on Alcoholism and the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

Marlatt is survived by his wife Kathryn Moore, his son Christopher Alan (Kit) Marlatt and his daughter-in-law Ashley Rachel Marlatt, his half-brother Robert Whitehead, his step-daughters Melanie and Charlotte Miller and Iara Coltrim, his step-son Colin Maclay, step-granddaughters Amanda and Seraphina White, and his grandson Aidan-Jack Marlatt.

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