

Audrius V. Plioplys MD, FRCPC

Balzekas Museum 2011

"Man of the Year"



Neurologic and artistic accomplishments

For over 30 years, Dr. Plioplys has been both a neurologist / neuroscientist and a professional artist.

Early History

He was born in Toronto, Canada, where he attended St. Cecelia's elementary school. His family moved to Chicago where he completed St. Rita High School, graduating as valedictorian.

He then studied physics and chemistry at the University of Chicago, and graduated from the Pritzker School of Medicine, University of Chicago in 1975. At that time this medical school was rated the second best in the United States, after Harvard University.

- Medical internship--University of Wisconsin in Madison
- Adult neurology and pediatrics residencies--Mayo Clinic
- Child neurology--chief resident--Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto
- Medical Research Council of Canada research fellowship--neuroimmunology--Laval University--Quebec City--two years

He then returned to Toronto where he was a staff neurologist and neuroscience researcher at the Hospital for Sick Children, for three years.

He is board certified as a neurologist with special competence in child neurology, both in the United States and in Canada (by the Royal College of Physicians of Canada).

Neurology / Neurobiology

His neurology research has concentrated on finding causes and cures for cognitive disorders, from autism in children, to Alzheimer's Disease in the elderly.

He researched immunologic causes of autism and pioneered treatments of autistic children. While in Toronto, he ran an autism evaluation and treatment program. He established a neuroscience research laboratory to investigate causes of central nervous system disorders in children. He was an assistant professor, Department of Neurology, University of Toronto.

In 1990 he moved back to Chicago where he established an Alzheimer Disease research laboratory. Here he investigated inflammatory components as possible causes of this disease. Also, he established and ran Alzheimer Disease Clinics at Michael Reese Hospital and at Mercy Hospital where medication treatments under investigation were clinically evaluated. He was an assistant professor, Department of Neurology, University of Illinois.

Also, he established Chicago's only Chronic Fatigue Syndrome evaluation and treatment program which ran for 10 years at Mercy Hospital. This program led to the receipt of over \$2 million in research grants, and the publication of 25 research articles and reports.

In addition, for 20 years he dedicated himself to caring for severely cerebral palsied (CP) children and young adults. These are the most disabled and underprivileged individuals in our society. He was the medical director of 7 pediatric and young adult skilled nursing facilities, scattered across the entire Chicago metropolitan area. With the superb hands-on care provided by dedicated nurses, Dr. Plioplys has reported the world's best survival rates data for this severely disadvantaged population, an accomplishment that he is very proud of.

These clinical accomplishments were repeatedly cited in the current edition of Dr. Swaiman's two volume magnum opus, *Pediatric Neurology: Principles and Practice*, which is considered by many to be the Bible of child neurology. Also, Dr. Plioplys' research reports have been cited in many other publications including the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and the *New York Times*.

He pioneered vest-therapy and inhalation-therapy programs to prevent pneumonias in severely CP children. These treatment approaches have become standard treatment modalities in pediatric hospitals and intensive care units across North America.

- Published 75 clinical and research articles
- 62 abstracts
- Over 100 presentations to medical professionals

- Visiting professor of neurology to Sweden, Mexico, Jordan, and Lithuania
- 10 major research grants:
 - \$2.8 million (over \$2 million from the National Institutes of Health)

He is the Founder and Past-Chairman of the Pediatric Long-Term Care Section of the American Medical Director's Association. He has been a child neurology examiner for the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

- Peer reviewer for 14 medical journals
- Research grant reviewer for:
 - National Institutes of Health
 - Food and Drug Administration
 - Wellcome Trust (London, UK)
 - US Air Force Office of Scientific Research
 - Immunization Reaction Program of the US Department of Justice.

Art Career

The beginning of his artistic passion started in Toronto—a childhood friend introduced him to oil painting. It was during medical school at the University of Chicago, that Dr. Plioplys became seriously engaged in artistic activities—creating oil paintings, visiting museums and galleries, and studying the history of art. Over four years, the passion for art grew so strong, that after completing internship, he left medicine entirely, and dedicated himself to art.

At this juncture, he traveled coast-to-coast investigating art schools in North America. At every school he visited, without exception, he saw the same art being created: abstract expressionism. This was the artistic dogma of the day. Dr. Plioplys realized that he must pursue his own form of conceptual art independently. As an artist, he is entirely self-taught.

During these years that were fully dedicated to art, he had many exhibits which received favorable reviews. He also studied the accomplishments of the Lithuanian painter and composer M. K. Ciurlionis. He made many original discoveries which were published at the time, and eventually were included in his book *Ciurlionios: Mintys / Thoughts*.

This full-time commitment to art lasted three years, at which point he realized that he was not using his talents in neurology. He wanted to help others overcome their illnesses and disabilities. He then started neurology training at the Mayo Clinic. Also, he realized that his art must be combined with his neuroscience interests.

His art work has been an ongoing metaphorical investigation of consciousness and the thought process. Over time he has used many different techniques to pursue this vision, including outdoor installations, photography, works on paper, audio productions, indoor mixed-media installations, and more recently digital technology to create large scale prints on canvas. Even though his work is visually engaging, it is the concepts underlying the works that are of paramount importance. He has transformed the neurobiology research laboratory into an artist's studio. Dr. Plioplys has merged neurology and neuroscience with art.

Dr. Plioplys has been very successful in his art career. He has had 31 individual art exhibits (the first one, *Meaning*, in 1978 at the Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C., and the most recent, *Mindscales*, in 2011 at the Beverly Art Center in Chicago, which was a museum-size exhibit). He has participated in 84 group exhibits internationally, and his art work has been favorably reviewed innumerable (reviews can be found at: <http://www.plioplys.com/>). For almost all of the past 30 years he has had professional art gallery representation. His art works are in many private collections, and are on public display in many locations in the United States and Europe.

Hope and Spirit

Most recently, he has dedicated his time to address the historical imbalance in recent Eastern European history: that the North American public is well aware of Hitler's atrocities, but ignorant of Stalin's. His great-grandfather, both grandfathers, and one aunt died as a consequence of NKVD interrogations. His grandmother, a simple farm woman, at the age of 71 was deported to Siberia to be a lumberjack. Seven other aunts and uncles were also deported to Siberia. In order to inform the general public of Stalin's atrocities, he organized the Hope and Spirit multi-faceted exhibit and program, which has already received considerable media attention.

He lives in the Beverly neighborhood of Chicago with his wife Sigita. She is a child psychiatrist who specializes in pediatric neuropsychiatry. She works at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago and is an Associate Professor at Northwestern University. They have two daughters, Milda and Ausrine.

The *Hope & Spirit* series - Extended through April, 2012

Honoring Excellence - A Museum Tradition

The Tradition of honoring outstanding individuals for their accomplishments is a long-standing one at the Balzekas Museum. The Museum Excellence Award Recipients are diverse individuals, representing varied fields of expertise: including the arts, diplomacy, medicine, politics, industry, the law, community service, the environment, culture, history, and the media.

The awards ceremony takes place during the Museum's Annual Excellence Award Dinner. The 2011 dinner will be held on Saturday, Dec. 4, 2011 honoring this year's "Man of the Year": Dr. Audrius V. Plioplys.

Previous Balzekas Museum Award of Excellence Recipients Include:

Illinois US Senator Richard Durbin - 2010
Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus - 1984

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