Dr. Tom North, a Full Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Emory University since October 2010 passed away on June 23, 2014. Dr. North was a talented and dedicated researcher and member of the Laboratory of Biochemical Pharmacology. He earned his PhD in Biochemistry from the University of Arizona, Tucson in 1976. His early career focused on the biochemistry of vidarabine (ara-A), an early antiviral agent approved for the treatment of herpes simplex virus encephalitis in children and adults. Later, Dr. North was driven by a keen desire to eradicate HIV. His passion and talent led to groundbreaking discoveries that have shaped the field. He is best
known for developing animal models to study antiretroviral drugs in feline and macaque systems. Dr. North was one of the earliest feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) researchers in the world and worked to develop a FIV system to study antiviral nucleosides biochemically and in cell culture. Through this system, he selected and characterized the first drug-resistant lentivirus in cell culture (AZT-resistant FIV). During this work, several novel mutations were discovered that were later shown to occur in HIV-infected humans as well.

As Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) emerged and as an increasing number of drugs became approved for HIV therapy, it became clear to Dr. North that HIV-1 persisted in evading HAART by mechanisms other than drug resistance. He developed non-human primate models and used them to identify reservoirs of persistent virus that evade HAART and to design and test potential strategies for eradication of virus from infected individuals. Dr. North was also the first to explore the RT-SHIV system (a hybrid of HIV and SIV) in monkeys, using recombinant DNA to perform detailed analyses of viral load in drug-treated animals. The RT-SHIV model for HAART was the first to successfully model HAART in humans in terms of viral load suppression, viral decay kinetics and rebound of virus upon cessation of therapy. This research opened the era of HAART therapy in non-human primates that is now commonly used to mimic human disease and treatment.

Students and colleagues remember Dr. North as a dedicated researcher whose creative approaches inspired others to look for innovative solutions to HIV study and treatment. He published more than 60 peer reviewed papers, mentored more than ten graduate students and served many times as Chairman of the NIH AIDS Special Emphasis Panel reviewing animal models. He was highly respected by his peers for his fairness and dedication to science. His contributions to the field were eclipsed only by his kind manner, thoughtfulness and generosity of spirit. Dr. North was an avid dog lover and has been described as a walking baseball encyclopedia, particularly when it came to the St. Louis Cardinals, his favorite team. He loved Pinot Noir wines from Oregon, his birth state. We will sorely miss our friend and colleague.