

Department of Medicine Honors Dr. Ralph Nachman

As an internal medicine resident at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, Dr. Mark Pecker had heard of Dr. Ralph Nachman long before he met him.

"I first heard about him abstractly as this giant in the field who could do everything," said Dr. Pecker, vice chairman of educational affairs, program director and professor of clinical medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College.

Almost a decade later, Dr. Pecker would find himself leading the intern selection committee for Dr. Nachman, then the chairman of the Department of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College.

"I worked pretty closely with him throughout that," Dr. Pecker said, "and everything they said about him was true, but more so. His research accomplishments speak for themselves. He put vascular biology on the map. His papers are the most heavily quoted."

Dr. Nachman served as the chairman of the Department of Medicine at Weill Cornell from 1990 to 2007 and is now associate dean for clinical research and the Lewis Thomas University Professor of Medicine. To honor his remarkable career, the department, on behalf of its chairman Dr. Andrew Schafer, assembled a scientific tribute to its former chief, held Nov. 20 in Uris Auditorium.

Dr. Schafer also announced the creation of the Ralph L. Nachman, M.D., Distinguished Visiting Professorship in the Department of Medicine.

Dr. Herbert Pardes, president and CEO of New York-Presbyterian Hospital; Dr. David Hajjar, senior executive vice dean and executive vice provost of the Medical College; and Dr. Orli Etingin, director of the Iris Cantor Women's Health Center, introduced Dr. Nachman at the tribute.

"Whatever he goes into, he ends up as the president or chair," Dr. Pardes said. "He is a natural, distinguished leader."

Dr. Etingin first met Dr. Nachman in the early 1980s; she was a hematology resident and Dr. Nachman was her attending.

"He has this incredible ability to use basic scientific information and weave it together with clinical cases," Dr. Etingin said. "It was very inspiring to me as a resident. He is an amazing clinician but also a scientist. I wanted to be able to learn clinical medicine from him. He taught 'bench to bedside' long before translational medicine was a catchphrase."

In the winter of 1990, Dr. Nachman, then the director of the Division of Hematology-Oncology, was named the chairman of medicine and its physician-in-chief.

"Being asked to be the chair of the Department of Medicine is no fluff job," Dr. Hajjar said. "You really have to have made your mark as a scientist.

A native of Bayonne, N.J., Ralph Nachman received both his undergraduate and medical degrees from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. He first came to what was then called New York Hospital later that year as a pathology resident. In 1958, he left the Hospital to fulfill his military obligation, serving as a physician in the U.S. Navy. After completing his residency at Montefiore Hospital, Dr. Nachman returned to New York Hospital and Cornell University Medical College in 1962 to pursue a research fellowship.

Just one year later, he was appointed director of laboratories for clinical pathology at the Hospital and became a Medical College faculty member as an instructor in medicine. Dr. Nachman was named director of the Division of Hematology in 1968 and made professor of medicine in 1972. In 1979, he served as the co-director of the joint M.D.-Ph.D. program.

Dr. Nachman has previously served as vice chairman, acting chairman and acting co-chairman of the Department of Medicine.

For two years, 1987 to 1989, he served as a member of the Board of Overseers, representing the faculty of the Medical College.

At the time of his appointment to the chairmanship in 1990, then-dean Dr. G. Tom Shires said, "Dr. Nachman's achievements as a researcher and academician, as well as his commitment to medical education, will ensure that the Medical College continues its leading role in physician training and biomedical research."

"He was a very well-respected scientist who was suddenly thrust into a chairmanship," remembered Dr. E. Darracott Vaughan, chairman emeritus of the Department of Urology and the James J. Colt Professor of Urology at Weill Cornell. "He very quickly picked up the management and changing business aspects that were going on at the time. He realized there was a need for internal medicine and refocused the residency training so you could have of the option of patient care or academics. That was a bit of a surprise for someone who had primarily worked in research."

While Dr. Nachman deftly balanced the scientific, clinical and political roles of his career, Dr. Etingin remembers him as a man who was reluctant to embrace the more social aspect of his responsibilities.

"Over the course of all of his years, Dr. Nachman had to attend all these various dinners and grand rounds and commemorative events, and sometimes there were black-tie events during the week," Dr. Etingin said. "And there was nobody like Ralph who could be present at one of those and still be out the door by 8 o'clock. It's often a joke that when we see someone leaving one of these functions early that they're 'pulling a Nachman.'"

Dr. Russel Patterson and the History of Neurological Surgery at Weill Cornell

The brightest minds in neurological surgery in New York and beyond gathered at the Rockefeller Auditorium on Friday, Dec. 5, for a special program highlighting the rich history of the field, and the groundbreaking contributions of one particular neurosurgeon.

"New Frontiers in Neurological Surgery," organized by the Department of Neurological Surgery at Weill Cornell Medical College and hosted by Professor and Chairman Dr. Philip E. Stieg, gathered together more than a dozen physicians from Weill Cornell, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Rockefeller University and the University of Southern California.

The physicians delivered brief talks on the current state of neurological surgery and the new technologies that will yield advanced treatment and diagnostic methods.

A reception and dinner at the St. Regis Hotel followed the program.

While the hopes of tomorrow were broadly discussed, Dr. Stieg took an opportunity to look back at the genesis of neurological surgery at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, specifically the significant contributions of Dr. Russel Hugo Patterson.

"He is a translational researcher in the truest, most hands-on sense of the word," Dr. Stieg said of Dr. Patterson, who attended the program with his wife, Juliet Boyd Patterson. "He saw the translational train coming. So he laid the tracks we are running on today. He also built the train and kept it running on time."

A 1952 graduate of what was then the Cornell University Medical College, Dr. Patterson went on to serve as the attending-surgeon-in-charge of neurosurgery at the New York Hospital, and president of an array of professional organizations, including the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, the American Academy of Neurological Surgery, the Society of Neurological Surgeons, the New York State Neurological Surgical Society and the New York Society of Neurosurgery. In 2000, Dr. Patterson received the Cushing Medal, the highest honor granted by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons.

In 1971, when Dr. Patterson was named neurosurgeon-in-charge at New York Hospital, he also published a paper in the Journal of the American Medical Association on his invention of a filter that removed 99 percent of microemboli (small blood clots) from the bloodstream.

Dr. Patterson also helped pioneer the use of deep hypothermia in surgery. In one instance, in 1966, Dr. Patterson removed two aneurysms from a patient using the technique.

"When the body temperature [of the patient] was 5 degrees Celsius and the brain temperature was about 12 to 15 degrees, all the blood was drained from the body," Dr. Stieg explained. "Surgery began and repair of the aneurysm took 29 minutes. This was one of 30 such operations done at the New York Hospital at the time, using the hypothermia technique."

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Dr. Patterson's legacy extends far beyond surgical innovation. His true mark might best be measured in the residents he trained and the careers he has helped guide.

"Where would we be today, as neurosurgeons and translational researchers, if Dr. Patterson had not helped build the tracks that take us on our journey?" Dr. Stieg said.

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Postdoctoral Studies Showcased at Research Day

Organizers from the Postdoctoral Association and Dr. Lynda Pierini, faculty director of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs at Weill Cornell Medical College, added a new twist to this year's Annual Postdoctoral Research Day, held Dec. 3 at the Weill Greenberg Center.

Instead of handing out awards for the best poster and podium presentations, which had been the norm, this year's event offered raffled-off prizes for all the participants. The change came about at the suggestion of Eva Gonzalez, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow in the biochemistry department.

"We felt that, especially with the posters, it is nearly impossible to find an equitable way to judge," Dr. Pierini said. "We also wanted to emphasize that this is a collegial event."

Building on a component that was introduced last year, 14 investigators from Cornell University in Ithaca were included in the research display. In total, dozens of postdocs contributed 16 podium and 38 poster presentations.

"It's very interesting to see what your colleagues are working on," said Alexander G. Georgiev, who arrived here from Stockholm three months ago to work in lab of Dr. Anant Menon in the biochemistry department.

"I'm looking to help us build a stronger research community," Dr. Pierini said. "Postdocs can learn who their peers are in other departments, what they do, and how they can work together to answer the more challenging research questions that we face today."

Postdoctoral associates work far from the spotlight that other scientists and physicians may enjoy. Their efforts are vital for a laboratory's principal investigator. As the postdocs oversee the day-to-day functions of the lab, the principals can concentrate on teaching, securing funding and representing the Medical College at scientific meetings.

Two laboratory leaders are recognized annually by the postdoctoral associates for their commitment to mentoring. This year's Excellence in Mentoring awards went to Dr. Teresa Ann Milner, professor of neuroscience, and Dr. Frederick Maxfield, chairman of the Department of Biochemistry and the Vladimir Horowitz and Wanda Toscanini Distinguished Professor of Neuroscience.

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Dr. Daniel Alonso Speaks on WCMC-Q at Alumni Reunion Weekend

Dr. Daniel Alonso, dean of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, addressed attendees of the WCMC Alumni Reunion Weekend at Uris Auditorium on Oct. 24. His presentation "Curious About Weill Cornell in Qatar?" provided the audience of distinguished alumni with an overview of this historic expansion of the Medical College.

In his presentation, Dr. Alonso detailed how the curriculum and standards of WCMC in New York have been replicated in Qatar, and the various affiliations that have made WCMC-Q possible, including sponsorship by the Qatar Foundation, the clinical partnership with Hamad Medical Corporation, and the growth of the Sidra Medical and Research Center, due to be completed in 2011. Also discussed was the developing research program, and the five-year plan that will carry it into the future.

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Grant Could Help Lead the Way to Fewer Biopsies for Breast Cancer

Dr. Rache Simmons, the Weiskopf Professor of Surgical Oncology at Weill Cornell Medical College, was presented on Friday, Dec. 5, with a grant of \$100,000 from the Manhasset Women's Coalition Against Breast Cancer.

The grant will benefit the research of Dr. Simmons and Dr. Dikoma Shungu on the sensitivity and specificity of a novel and highly optimized imaging approach for detection of breast lesion malignancy. The research could possibly validate the powerful, new MRI method that detects cancerous cells with enhanced precision. Results from the research may eventually allow women to avoid unnecessary biopsies of benign breast lesions.

"This will allow us to continue with our goal of finding less and less invasive ways to treat and diagnose breast cancer," Dr. Simmons said. "Current MRI technology is very good at detecting abnormal areas that may be breast cancer. The downside, however, is that MRIs often draw attention to areas that are not actually cancer. We hope this new technology called MRS will provide more specific information regarding which patients do or do not have cancer and spare many women unnecessary benign breast biopsies."

Dr. Simmons; Dr. Shungu, director of the Laboratory of Advanced Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy Research; and Dr. Kemi Babagbemi are the principal investigators for this project. "We are actually going to look at the chemistry of the lesion," Dr. Shungu said. "We can look at it without having to cut it."

In presenting Drs. Simmons and Shungu with the funds, Debra Arenare, vice president of research for the Coalition, said, "We are very appreciative of being able to support your work. It is going to make a tremendous impact on so many women."

This is second grant the Manhasset Women's Coalition Against Breast Cancer has awarded to Dr. Simmons.

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