

## **Weill Cornell Medical College Granted NIH Contract to Build Neuroscience Database**

Dr. Daniel Gardner, professor of physiology and biophysics and professor of physiology and biophysics in neuroscience, has been granted the highly prestigious and competitive contract to build the new Neuroscience Information Framework for the National Institutes of Health. The project will be led by Dr. Gardner on behalf of Weill Cornell Medical College.

The Framework will be a clearinghouse for neuroscientists to formulate questions and direct those questions to one or more public information resources, allowing researchers to locate if or where the disparate information exists. Users will have access to a number of neuroscience databases and sites that archive such data.

Planned as being more than just a “database of databases,” the Neuroscience Information Framework will use new technology that will enable end-users to quickly and efficiently upload and download information. It will enable concept-based queries (spanning multiple levels of biological organization and function) within and across the diverse types of information constituting the information inventory. In addition, the Framework’s “frame” will be sufficiently flexible to be scaled and extended in the future, offering additional functionalities supporting a greater information base. All work will be open source – the technology and access methods will be made freely available.

“Our goal is to make data and findings available to researchers and other interested parties in order to promote a greater understanding of brain function and disease,” said Dr. Gardner. The Neurodatabase Gateway, an existing online resource maintained by the Society for Neuroscience, will serve as the NIH Framework’s model. The initial 15-month exploratory stage of the project, budgeted at more than half a million dollars, is currently underway. The Neuroscience Information Framework’s building is scheduled for Phase II in 2007.

Weill Cornell Medical College and the Laboratory of Neuroinformatics, which Dr. Gardner leads, are the prime contractors selected by the NIH to oversee the project. (The Laboratory presently maintains neurodatabase.org and brainml.org, sites for researchers to contribute and access annotated neuroscientific data.) Subcontracts have been granted to Yale University, University of California at San Diego, George Mason University and the California Institute of Technology. Nine other sites are contributing expertise and methods to the project. The Neuroscience Information Framework is an effort in conjunction with and approved by the Society of Neuroscience, which is a 37,000-member major scientific organization, and is funded in whole or in part with federal funds from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services. For more information, visit [neuroscienceblueprint.nih.gov/funding.html](http://neuroscienceblueprint.nih.gov/funding.html).

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## **Dr. Jo Ivey Boufford to Deliver Lubin Distinguished Visiting Professor Lecture (October 26)**

Dr. Jo Ivey Boufford has been named the 2005 Lorraine and Ralph Lubin Distinguished Visiting Professor by the Department of Public Health. Dr. Boufford, who currently serves as professor of public service, health policy and management at Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University, will be speaking on “The Health Workforce and Global Health” at the David Rogers Health Policy Colloquium on October 26 at 1:00 p.m. in Uris Faculty Room (A-126). Dr. Boufford will also be on campus throughout the day for meetings with students, faculty and residents.

Dr. Boufford is a widely recognized authority on various public health issues, including health care for minorities, and policies and reform of local, national and global health. Board-certified in pediatrics, Dr. Boufford has held a number of prominent positions throughout her 30-year career. She most recently served as dean of NYU’s Wagner School, and was the former principal deputy assistant secretary for health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. From 1994 to 1997, she was the U.S. representative of the executive board to the World Health Organization, and was re-appointed to the position in 1998. She has served as director of the King’s Fund College, a royal charity dedicated to the support of health and social services in London; as president of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, the largest municipal system in the United States; and as director of the residency program in social medicine at Montefiore Hospital and Medical Center, a program to prepare pediatricians, internists and family physicians for primary care practice in the inner city with a team and community focus. Dr. Boufford has held additional faculty positions at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Lehman College of Nursing. She is also currently clinical professor of pediatrics at NYU Medical School.

Dr. Boufford is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship at the Institute of Medicine (1979-1980) and membership to the Institute of Medicine (1992), where she now serves on the executive council. She has been a member of the board of directors for many organizations, such as the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Center for Health Care Strategies, New York Blood Center, and United Hospital Fund.

After graduating magna cum laude from the University of Michigan with a degree in psychology, Dr. Boufford received her M.D. with distinction from the University of Michigan Medical School in 1971. Her residency in social pediatrics was completed at Montefiore Medical Center. In 1992, she received an Honorary Doctorate of Science degree from the State University of New York, Brooklyn.

The Lorraine and Ralph Lubin Distinguished Visiting Professorship in Public Health was established with a gift from Dr. Madelon Lubin Finkel, professor of clinical public health, in memory of her parents. The Lubin Distinguished Visiting Professorship supports an annual lecture by a prominent speaker to address important, timely issues in public health care.

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## **William Helfand to Deliver Heberden Society Lecture (November 17)**

William Helfand, award-winning medical historian, writer and collector, will present the first Heberden Society Lecture for the 2005-2006 academic year on Thursday, November 17th, at 5:00 p.m. in Uris Faculty Room (A-126) at Weill Cornell Medical College. The title of his lecture will be "Quackery: An Illustrated History." The lecture is open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.

Mr. Helfand, a retired pharmaceutical executive, is the author of five books, including "Pharmacy: An Illustrated History" (with David Cowan); "The Picture of Health," published by the University of Pennsylvania Press; and "Quack, Quack, Quack," a catalogue of recent exhibitions at the Grolier Club and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He is a consultant to the National Library of Medicine, a fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine, president of the Library Company of Philadelphia, a member of the Council of the Grolier Club of New York, and a trustee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In 2003, he was the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the American Association of the History of Medicine.

The Heberden Society was established at the Medical Center in 1975 by a group of medical interns and residents who were interested in promoting the history of medicine. The society sponsors three lectures during each academic year. The society is named after Sir William Heberden the younger (1767-1845), who served as physician to King George III of England in his last days. King George III was the sovereign who granted the charter for The New York Hospital in 1771.

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## Medical Malpractice Discussed at First COGS Lecture

The contentious issue of medical malpractice was the topic of discussion at the inaugural lecture of the Cornell Obstetrics and Gynecology Society (COGS) on September 29 in Weill Auditorium at the Medical College.

“The politicized debate is unhealthy to doctors and patients,” said invited speaker Jennifer Arlen, professor of New York University School of Law. Doctors who bluster and point fingers in the fallout of medical error are derailing the advancement of a much-needed, candid discussion of what goes wrong and why, she said.

Professor Arlen classified factors in medical error under two rubrics: problems in information (inadequate diagnosis, improper treatment, mistakes in writing or handling prescriptions) and problems inherent in the system (inadequate supervision and exhausted doctors functioning on little sleep).

The legal tort system is necessary “not to punish or compensate, but to provide incentives to alter behavior,” she said, inducing those at the helm of medical care to invest in quality and safety at their facilities. She acknowledged major problems with the tort system: chiefly, that doctors bear substantial liability costs even without a record of negligence. In a dilemma that hits home for many COGS members, she added that high-risk births might unfairly indict a doctor for permanent injuries, something the tort system cannot address or mitigate.

Damage caps on the amount of money demanded, in Professor Arlen’s opinion, are the worst solution possible: they hurt patients with legitimate claims, will not reduce frivolous claims, and relieve the pressure on hospitals to remedy the causes of error. She feels a better solution is to shift the financial burden and liability of doctors to hospitals and medical care organizations, to underscore the idea that negligence often springs from system-wide flaws.

Dr. Amos Grunebaum, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, director of the Clinical Maternal-Fetal Medicine Division and chief of labor and delivery at Weill Cornell, reminded the medical students that “you can make a difference,” urging them to work to change the system. The ob/gyn specialty has the highest relative risk of malpractice claims of any field; its doctors pay three to five times the amount of malpractice in other specialties. The premium has surged 271 percent since 2000, Dr. Grunebaum said.

What’s more, lawyers are waging an Internet campaign to encourage birth malpractice suits, Dr. Grunebaum said.

But the reflexive doctor tactics of “denial, discounting, and distancing” only exacerbate the problem, he said. Instead, doctors should educate themselves in malpractice issues, labor to improve the system, and place a premium on teamwork and communication.

“The attitude ‘to err is human’ breaks the silence surrounding medical errors, and spares finger pointing,” he said.

He proclaimed the need for a paradigm shift in medical attitudes and beliefs: from “I am perfect” to “I am fallible”; “I work alone” to “I work with others”; and “Monitoring offends me” to “Monitoring protects me.”

It’s a biological fact that cognitive, psychomotor performance plummets after sustained wakefulness, he said. Therefore, residents must continue to throw their weight behind efforts like the Bell regulations, which place stringent limits on the length of shifts and mandate a certain period of rest between work days.

Team coordination is also proven to reduce the likelihood of medical error. Weill Cornell Medical College was one of the first to implement the team training used by NASA and pilots for critical communication, Dr. Grunebaum said.

“You are the ones I expect to be the leaders, change the system, and work as a team,” he told the students.

The Cornell Obstetrics and Gynecology Society, founded in June by fourth-year medical student Adam Weitzman, aims to involve medical students in women’s health issues and promote education, advocacy and support for the goals of women’s health-care providers.

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## **In Memoriam: Dr. George Reader**

Dr. George Reader, the Livingston Farrand Professor Emeritus of Public Health and Professor Emeritus of Medicine, passed away on October 13 at his home in Rye, N.Y. He was 86.

A lifelong Cornellian, Dr. Reader's research focused on socio-economic influences on illness and the delivery of medical care. He was an early champion of comprehensive care, and helped shape public health policy on state and national levels.

From 1961 to 1965, Dr. Reader served as chairman of the human ecology section of the National Institutes of Health. In 1966, he served as an advisor to the Social Security Administration during the Johnson Administration, influencing the formulation and eventual passage of Medicare legislation. Dr. Reader was a consultant for a number of federal agencies, including the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (1967); the Office of the Secretary in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) (1967-1968); and the Health Services and Mental Health Administration at HEW (1970-1972). In 1971, he was appointed co-chairman of the technical committee on training of the White House Conference on Aging. From 1974 to 1984, Dr. Reader was a member of the New York State Governor's Health Advisory Council.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., Dr. Reader always knew he wanted to be a doctor. When he was 10, his father gave him a microscope, which he used to study raindrops in the garden. With a natural curiosity in science and medicine, Dr. Reader enrolled at Cornell University in Ithaca in 1936, and graduated with a degree in animal biology. It was there that he also met his future wife, Helen, to whom he had been married for 63 years.

Soon after college, he enrolled at Cornell University Medical College, graduating in three years. Toward the end of his internship at The New York Hospital in 1944, Dr. Reader, already a Naval Lieutenant Junior Grade, was called to active duty. By the end of World War II, he had been promoted to Lieutenant and became commanding officer of a medical detachment.

In 1947, Dr. Reader returned to the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center to complete his residency, and stayed with Cornell for the next 45 years. He served with distinction in a number of roles, moving up the academic and clinical tracks to eventually become chairman and physician-in-chief for the Department of Public Health from 1972 to 1992. In 1992, Dr. Reader was named recipient of the Maurice R. Greenberg Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Medical Center. "If we were to mention all the honors George has received, all his appointments and memberships in distinguished organizations, we'd be here till dawn," said Dr. Bob Michels, past dean of the Medical College, the night Dr. Reader received his Greenberg Award.

"He was a superb and compassionate clinician, skilled teacher, and dedicated researcher," said Dr. Alvin Mushlin, chairman of the Department of Public Health. "He was beloved and respected by all."

*Each patient deserves comprehensive care from one or several health professionals – care that is coordinated, continuous, complete and compassionate for every episode of illness.*

-Dr. George Reader

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## Awards and Honors

**Dr. Ronald Crystal**, chairman of the Department of Genetic Medicine and the Bruce Webster Professor of Internal Medicine, was recently elected as an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. At the ceremony held at the historic Royal College headquarters on Kildare Street in Dublin, Dr. Crystal was honored for his contributions to pulmonary research. The citation nominating him to this honor read:

“During his time at NIH and later in Cornell, Ron Crystal transformed Pulmonary Medicine and Pulmonary Research. He changed the discipline from what was essentially physiology-based research to one encompassing cell and molecular biology. His publication record speaks for itself with over 680 publications in the very highest impact journals. His success is attested to by the fact that many of the successful pulmonary programs throughout the U.S. and indeed the world contain at senior levels alumni of his training programs. He is one of the major figures in Pulmonary Medicine.”

The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland was founded in 1654, and presently has over 3000 members. Among its famous physician presidents were Robert Graves, William Stokes and Dominic Corrigan. Some of the distinguished Honorary Fellows were William Osler, Josef Skoda, Johannes Muller, Armand Trousseau, Jean-Martin Charcot and William Gowers.

**Dr. Roger Hartl**, assistant professor of neurological surgery, and **Dr. Jamshid Ghajar**, clinical professor of neurological surgery, were among the Brain Trauma Foundation’s prestigious panel of authors who have contributed to the third edition of the Guidelines for the Management of Severe Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). The expanded and updated guidelines are based on the most rigorous scientific research available. Each author reviews numerous articles in TBI literature to assess their quality and level of research. The guidelines have a huge impact on care, said Dr. Hartl, because it leads to treatment protocols and pathways that unify treatments of head injuries across the world.

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