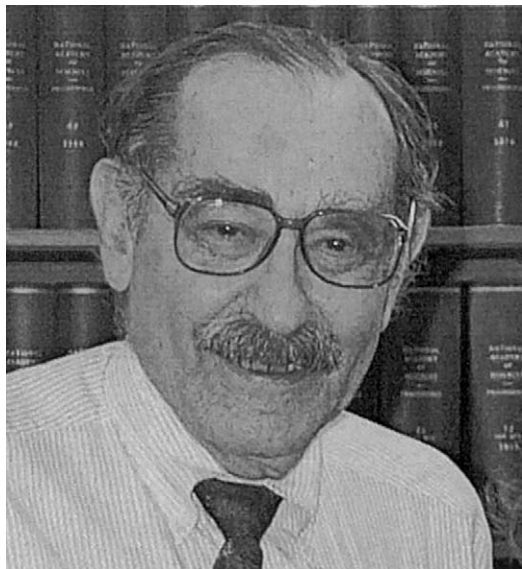


2002 ASHG AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION Education: A Joint Effort*

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I am most grateful to the Information and Education Committee and the Awards Committee, as well as to the whole Society, for considering me worthy of this great honor. I am particularly happy that the person who agreed to introduce me is Barton Childs, a previous and much more deserving recipient of this Award in 1996. Barton has been a role model for me, not only in clinical and basic human genetics but, particularly, as an educator, and he is one of the few who have persisted in the difficult task of educating the medical profession and the public in this important field. The recognition by organized medicine that all specialties are branches of human genetics has been slow in coming, but, like Barton, I retain optimism that this will happen.

The importance of the teaching of human genetics in

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the broad field of biomedical science is clear from the backgrounds of the eight recipients of this Award: Drs. Childs and Scriver are M.D.s from pediatrics; Drs. McKusick and Motulsky are M.D.s from internal medicine; Drs. Thompson and Li are Ph.D.s from basic and population genetics; Dr. Fraser, an M.D./Ph.D. from experimental genetics and counseling; and I, coming from the fields of pediatrics and internal medicine, and, as some of the others, from the laboratory, exemplify the pervasive importance of our field in medicine and biology.

Although, at the beginning of my career in human genetics, I had a multitude of goals, in a few of which I was fortunate enough to have a bit of success, my major goal has always been to follow the example of the three clinician-scientists who have been my inspirations, Drs. Charles Wilkinson, Harry Harris, and Horace Hodes, in their major commitment to teach future generations. The success of a number of the 50 or so trainees whom I have had the pleasure of teaching is, in my opinion, the true and only reason for my accepting this Award.

In my academic lifetime, I have seen many major changes in medical education. My student days began by spending most of the first two years of medical school in laboratories doing some interesting, but mostly boring, exercises and sitting long hours in the classroom being talked at by professors whose talents often included everything from sedation to show business. After several swings of the curriculum, the most recent trend has been toward small group sessions, with students dependent to a great part on self-education. While none of the various approaches have been anywhere near perfect, they seem to have succeeded equally well in allowing our medical students to become reasonably good physicians and our predocs to be good scientists. Most of us in this room, especially those in laboratories, genetics clinics, and counseling programs, do not believe strongly in any of these methods but have relied for many decades on teaching on a one-on-one basis and by example. To many, it is this method of preceptorship which we must continue to encourage and not lose to the whims of the educationists who more and more are determining what happens to our students during their training years. It is this method of personal involvement, of course, which allows us to seduce and persuade those most interested in our field to become pre- and postdoctoral fellows and

to try to shape them into what, rightly or wrongly, we feel is the right mold.

The source of the word “education” is from the Latin “*educere*” which means “to lead out.” This could be interpreted as “leading one’s students out from ignorance,” but I prefer to interpret it as “leading out one’s students’ thought processes to allow for a broad approach to the topic at hand.” I believe that this definition emphasizes the joint participation of teacher and student in the effort toward understanding. Since, therefore, education involves an effort by all parties involved, it emphasizes the truism that one cannot teach without simultaneously learning from the questions and input of those one teaches. This is true throughout our lives, in that, as colleagues, we must continually educate each other with a firm commitment to open exchange of information. Unfortunately, our present emphasis on competition, believed necessary by some but counterproductive in the long run, inhibits this basic tenet of education. We must be and remain a community of scholars and avoid the

temptation of simply outdoing each other. For me, the meetings of the Society since my first one in 1956 have represented the best in learning and teaching, and I retain my perhaps naïve optimism that they will remain so for the future.

I am also most pleased that the recipient of the Curt Stern Award this year is Jim Lupski, who represents the full breadth of our discipline and, over his short and highly productive career, has been an exemplary student and teacher of human genetics. He represents a prime example of the secure future of our field. He also represents a link to the person who has probably taught me the most, my wife, Dr. Rochelle Hirschhorn, who was one of his teachers in his early days. Finally, I am most pleased and proud that sitting in the audience is a person whom I have educated since his birth and who has taught me how to be an educator; a new member of our Society, my son, Dr. Joel Hirschhorn.

Again, thank you for this great honor.