

2006 ASHG LEADERSHIP AWARD

Introductory Speech for David L. Rimoin*

Michael Kaback



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It is my pleasure and honor to introduce the recipient of the first American Society of Human Genetics Leadership Award, presented to my colleague, friend, and leader for more than 35 years, David L. Rimoin, M.D., Ph.D.—Professor of Pediatrics, Medicine, and Human Genetics at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and Steven Spielberg Chair and Director of the Medical Genetics Institute at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. This award is given in recognition of David's enduring vision, creativity, and enormous contributions to the field of human and medical genetics.

Born and raised in Montreal, Canada, David received his bachelor's degree with honors in genetics from McGill in 1957. He remained at McGill for his medical and master of science (in Genetics) degrees, both awarded in 1961. (The latter degree was earned for work carried out with Clarke Fraser and Julius Metrakos.) In 1963, after two years of internship and internal medicine residency at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, he moved to the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore to complete his medical residency and to begin his lifelong relationship with Victor McKusick. Here, David began his seminal studies in hereditary aspects of several endocrine disorders, particularly

diabetes mellitus, growth hormone-deficient states, and dwarfism. In 1967, David received his Ph.D. in Human Genetics from Johns Hopkins University. His thesis was entitled "Genetic Disorders of the Endocrine Glands."

From 1967 to 1970, David was assistant professor of Medicine and Pediatrics at Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, and the creator and director of the Medical Genetics Clinic at the Barnes and Children's Hospitals of St. Louis. His next major creation began in 1970, when he moved to Harbor-UCLA in Los Angeles to initiate and develop the Division of Medical Genetics (jointly) in the Departments of Medicine and Pediatrics at that institution. Over the next 16 years, David led, guided, and contributed to an extraordinary array of people, projects, events, and developments, many of which have proven critical to our field as it is now constituted.

In 1986, David moved to the Cedars-Sinai Hospital campus of UCLA School of Medicine to become chairman of the Department of Pediatrics and director of Medical Genetics-Birth Defects Center. His marvelous contributions to the Pediatric program there are the subjects for other venues. Suffice it to say that his leadership there was paramount in making Cedars Pediatrics one of the most outstanding programs in the region. He remained chair of Pediatrics until 2004, when he stepped down from that position and became the first director of the newly created Medical Genetics Institute at Cedars-Sinai, a post which he holds to the present.

David has received so many honorary awards and has been elected by his peers to so many important posts that space does not permit a full listing of each. However, I must mention a few that underscore his extraordinary leadership skills, fundamental to this award. His research has been acknowledged by his receiving the Ross Outstanding Young Investigator Award of the Western Society of Pediatric Research (1976), the E. Mead Johnson Award for Research in Pediatrics of the American Academy of Pediatrics (1976), and the March of Dimes Colonel Harland Sanders Award for Lifetime Achievement in Genetic Sciences (1997). His global contributions have been identified with his election to the Johns Hopkins University Society of Scholars (1990), membership in the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences (1992), and

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* Previously presented at the annual meeting of The American Society of Human Genetics, in New Orleans, on October 12, 2006.

Am. J. Hum. Genet. 2007;81:668-669. © 2007 by The American Society of Human Genetics. All rights reserved. 0002-9297/2007/8104-0010\$15.00
DOI: 10.1086/521410

election to Fellowship in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1997).

He has been elected to the board of directors and as an officer of numerous professional societies. He served as secretary-treasurer of APCR (1973–1976), as president of the Western Society of Clinical Research (1978), and as president of the Western Society for Pediatric Research (1995). As to genetics societies specifically, David served as a board member of ASHG (1977–1979) and was elected president of the ASHG in 1984. He was the founding president of the American Board of Medical Genetics (1979–1983) and then the founding president of the American College of Medical Genetics (ACMG) (1992–1998). In 1993, he served as president of the Council of Medical Genetic Organizations and as president of the American College of Medical Genetics Foundation (1998–2002). What a spectacular record of creativity, brilliance, and service to our profession!

What else, then, can be said that makes this man so appropriate for this first award in leadership? Certainly, his contributions to the organization and delivery of human genetics as outlined above are formidable, but his research and educational contributions are of equally superb quality. He has published more than 390 peer-reviewed articles and has written, edited, or coedited eight major books in our field. Over his years at Washington University in St. Louis, Harbor-UCLA, and Cedars, David has mentored and trained more than 100 M.D., Ph.D., or M.D.-Ph.D. pre- and postdoctoral students, the great majority of whom have gone on to academic positions throughout the world. His text book, with Alan Emery, *Principles and Practice of Medical Genetics*, now in its 5th edition, has become the “bible” in medical genetics for practitioners and counselors worldwide. The Birth-Defects Meetings with the March of Dimes and the ACMG are David’s creation, to mention only one of the scores of conferences and meetings that David has organized for the education of students, clinicians, and academicians, both in this country and abroad. The UCLA Intercampus Genetics Training Program likewise was conceived of by “DLR” (as the ever-present Suzy Lief, his superb office manager, likes to call him).

Finally, his leadership in research must be addressed. Since his early days with Victor McKusick, David Rimoin has been *the* driving force in research on a diverse and perplexing group of hereditary disorders, the skeletal dysplasias. In the early ‘70s, at Harbor-UCLA, David started the International Skeletal Dysplasia Registry (with Ralph Lachman, radiologist, and Marianne Priore, coordinator), a program that continues to the present, with NIH funding since its inception. This effort has served to enable histologic, radiologic, biochemical, and, most recently, molecular studies into the identification and etiology of what are now more than 250 distinct disorders of bone, cartilage, and/or connective-tissue origin. The basic defect in about 150 of these conditions has now been identified, many (about 40) with the direct participation and codiscovery by the Rimoin group. These investigations have greatly enhanced the clinical identification, management, and genetics counseling for many of these disorders. In a few instances, there are even potential therapeutic implications that David and his colleagues are pursuing. As with his earlier research, predicting the heterogeneous nature of diabetes mellitus and elucidating various mechanisms of growth-hormone deficiency or insensitivity (and their resultant impact on stature), David consistently has led our thinking and basic understanding of several groups of important human genetic disorders.

It should be evident, therefore, that, from all perspectives—research, education, and organizational contributions—David Rimoin has been absolutely stellar as a leader in human/medical genetics and one who is without peer. It is most fitting, therefore, that the first Leadership Award given by the American Society of Human Genetics be presented to him. I would end my comments, however, by pointing out that this award doesn’t even relate to David’s greatest and most rewarding challenge of leadership—i.e., leading his magnificent and wonderful family: his remarkable wife, Ann Garber Rimoin, Dr.Ph., and his three F1s, Anne (Ph.D., epidemiology), Michael (Middlebury graduate), and Lauren (Stanford senior). David has made a fantastic contribution to them and to all of us, and I know that all will share in congratulating David on this beautiful acknowledgement of his life’s work.