2-1-2002

Washington University Record, February 1, 2002

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Newborn lungs
Respiratory illness focus of research effort
By Anne Enright Sheppard

Some newborns with severe breathing problems recover fully, while others can have lingering respiratory illness or even require a lung transplant to live. New School of Medicine research could help physicians more quickly determine which infants will improve and which will worsen so that necessary therapy can be started as early as possible. The work is being supported by two grants totaling $4.4 million from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

One of the most serious forms of respiratory distress is due to results from a lack of pulmonary surfactant, a substance produced by the lungs that keeps them inflated during childhood. Without enough surfactant, the lungs lose their elasticity, breathing becomes difficult and the baby may die. In 1993, researchers at the medical school discovered the gene for surfactant protein B (SP-B), a key component of this protein. J. Sessions Cole, M.D., the Park E. White, Jr. Professor of Pediatrics, and his colleagues will process for the SP-B gene by the baby’s heel at birth will be looked for genetic variations in more than 50,000 children on four continents.

The work is being done to look for genetic variations in the gene for SP-B, mutations in the gene for SP-B, and other genes related to respiratory disease may one day help physicians predict who is more likely to have respiratory disease. The work is being done to look for genetic variations in the gene for SP-B, mutations in the gene for SP-B, and other genes related to respiratory disease.

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Trinkaus to be named Hemenway professor

Eric Trinkaus, Ph.D., professor of anthropology, will be named the Mary Tileston Hemenway Professor of Anthropology, will be named the Mary Tileston Hemenway Professor of Anthropology, and dean of Arts & Sciences. A formal installation will take place March 5.

Trinkaus is the initial holder of the Hemenway Professorship, established in 2002 to honor the contributions of Mary Tileston Hemenway (1882-1896) to the University, as well as to the field of anthropology.

"Professor Trinkaus is the world’s most influential scholar of Neandertal biology and evolution," Macias said. "His major contributions to the Neandertals have no less than redefined the scientific study of them. He is also an excellent teacher, bringing his first-hand perspective to the classroom.

"I look forward to him being the first holder of the Hemenway Professorship, and we look forward to his continued good work in the years to come."

Trinkaus earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1973 and a doctorate in 1975. He was appointed professor of anthropology in Arts & Sciences in 1979 and in 1997.

"His research has consisted with the evolution of our genus as a background to his research on human-Neandertal relationships." The anthropologist’s degree is the Mary Tileston Hemenway Professorship.

One Brookings Drive, St. Louis, MO 63130.

By Lisa Otten

In many respects, Brentwood, Mo., is the West End of St. Louis. At opposite ends of the urban sprawl spectrum, Brentwood, one of the oldest and most prosperous inner-city suburbs, sits just a few minutes west of the St. Louis city limits along U.S. Highway 40/ Interstate 64, while Swansea, a small former farming village rests on the other side of the Mississippi River, some 14 miles southeast of downtown.

In recent years, Swansea has begun to attract the kind of intense commercial development that Brentwood, home to the Saint Louis Galleria and other "big-box" retailers, has known for decades. National chain stores are sprawling up along the town’s main traffic artery, and older homes are being outfitted by new developers.

And while Brentwood is currently planning a new Metrolink light rail station, Swansea recently opened one. All of which makes the pair a perfect point-counterpoint for the School of Architecture’s inaugural Master of Urban Design program. Launched this fall with 12 students, the MULT program is a kind of "academic think tank" for regional urban planners, offering both a one-year post-professional degree and a dual Master of Architecture/Master of Urban Design.

"Students today are working on larger and larger scales, and they have to be able to look at a whole town, to redesign our cities in ways that limit the amount of space we take up and allow for reconstruction and growth," said Tatom added. "We always think of parking lots as residual space, yet they’re really this new kind of hybrid that we all have to learn to operate in from time to time," said Tatom.

"The question is, how do you make those kinds of spaces, which have been thought of purely in terms of consumption or production, in a way that’s socially and semiologically more vital?" Tatom concluded. "We truly believe that there are opportunities for creating a heightened sense of social interaction, that a ‘public realm,’ however amorphous that definition, is possible. It’s just that nobody has ever conceptualized it in these environments before."
Neurofibromatosis gene change affects tumors

By Jim Davidson

A tiny change in the cells of patients with neurofibromatosis (NF) seems to contribute to formation of aggressive tumors and could help explain why the disease — which predisposes patients to develop tumors — affects people in different ways.

Reporting in the January issue of the journal Genetics, investigators in the St. Louis area describe a small, molecular variation in some tumor samples taken from neurofibromatosis patients.

"Neurofibromatosis is a common, inherited disease that affects about one in 3,000 people," said co-investigator Nicholas O. Davidson, M.D., professor of medicine and of molecular biology and pharmacology and director of the Division of Gastroenterology. "The gene responsible spans a large region of chromosome 17, but we have found that very small changes in the NF gene's messenger RNA (mRNA) can inactivate the critical role of a protein, a gene called neurofibromin."

Neurofibromatosis suppressor tumors develop because the gene is inactivated, its tumor-suppressing activity is lost, and patients with NF develop a wide variety of tumors.

In the preliminary study, approximately 25 percent of tumors studied had evidence of a small, base pair change in the mRNA called RNA editing — that occurs when mRNA is edited before leaving the nucleus of the cell. Cells that did have the change, however, seemed to be more vulnerable to tumor formation.

Because patients inherit two copies of the NF gene, most researchers believe in a "two hit" mechanism that leads to tumors. "Finding such a change could hit comes when a person is born with one normal copy of the gene that is mutated to cause the disease, but that person would actually develop tumors in the presence of normal mRNA," said Davidson. "When a cell makes a protein, the first steps occur as the DNA encoding the gene is copied into a strand of messenger RNA." Davidson said. "The mRNA specifies the eventual sequence of amino acids in a protein. If a reading error or nucleotide sequence change occurs in the DNA as it is copied into mRNA, it can change both the amino acid sequence and the properties of the final protein. These same effects can be achieved by introducing RNA editing." The type of error that Davidson found in some NF tumor samples is known as C-to-U RNA editing. In human cells, DNA and RNA molecules consist of a string of blocks known as nucleotides that are described as a sequence of four letters. For RNA, the letters are AGCU. Davidson and colleagues found that when the NF gene is copied into mRNA, a C at a specific position is replaced by a U. That changes the protein made by the gene by introducing a signal to stop translation of the mRNA.

This process in effect turns off the neurofibromin tumor suppressor, making patients vulnerable to tumor formation.

Davidson and his colleagues first observed such C-to-U editing in an abundant gene expressed in the human gastrointestinal tract.

A gene normally made in the small intestine, called apolipoprotein B, is absolutely required for lipid transport," Davidson said. "Human small intestinal apolipoproteins are involved in the production of a protein that structures fat absorption."

Our study shows, however, that the same RNA editing mechanism is also extremely essential to normal function in the intestine, where it can inactivate the neurofibromin tumor suppressor in some patients, with unexpected consequences.

The evidence that RNA editing, similar to that occurring in the two-hit model, also occurs in the gut and in tumor tissue comes from the presence of an enzyme called apobec-1 (apolipoprotein editing catalytic component 1). Usually spoken mRNA is found only in the gut. But Davidson and his colleagues discovered apobec-1 in nerve sheath tumor samples taken from patients with neurofibromatosis.

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"The type of error that Davidson found in some NF tumor samples is known as"

Novel strategy for depression, Parkinson's disease study

By Joe DeRyder

Investigators in the School of Medicine are seeking volunteers for a research study for patients with Parkinson's disease and depression.

Many patients with Parkinson's disease get depressed, but the problem can go unrecognized. The reason is that some of the symptoms of Parkinson's disease — such as slow movement and difficulty making facial expressions — also are symptoms of depression.

Another complication involves medication:

"A lot of medications used to treat depression are not as effective in this patient group who also have Parkinson's disease," said Theresa Kormos, a nurse practitioner and a mental health clinical nurse specialist in the Department of Pediatrics. "Hitter studies that drug side effects make Parkinson's symptoms worse, or to protect patients from those side effects, the drugs are given at too low a dose to effectively treat the depression." Kormos is investigating a new treatment called transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) involves placing a magnet on the head and stimulating key regions of the brain with electromagnetic fields. Unlike another depression treatment, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), TMS does not require anesthesia, so patients can eat and drink what they want before treatment and often can drive themselves to and from appointments.

TMS has had some success as a depression treatment, and it even helps temporarily alleviate some Parkinson's disease symptoms.

"With any treatment for depression — either medication or ECT — one of the biggest problems is side effects, and we're finding that with TMS, side effects also is the first symptom to improve," Kormos said.

To be eligible for the study, participants must be at least 18 years old and have Parkinson's disease and symptoms of depression, such as sleep problems, extreme sadness or loss of interest in activities. Participants also must be experiencing feeling nervous can be a symptom of depression.

After an initial evaluation, study subjects will receive the investigational treatment every afternoon, Monday through Friday, for two weeks. Volunteers receive treatment as outpatients. Each visit will last approximately 65 minutes, except the initial evaluation, which may take an hour or more. Participants will receive screenings, a physical exam, electrocardiograms and TMS treatment free of charge.

The TMS device is not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a treatment for depression, but the FDA has approved using the device in research to determine whether it will be an effective depression treatment.

For more information or to volunteer for the study, call toll free (866) 252-2700.

Lungs

Respiratory studies may help newborns

From Page 1

Norway, Seoul, South Korea; and Cape Town, South Africa, will allow investigators to estimate the frequency of SP-B mutations in different ethnic groups and geographic areas. "This is the first attempt to do genetic risk assessment for respiratory distress." F. Sessions Cole

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led by Aaron Hamvas, M.D., associate professor of pediatrics. He, too, will investigate pulmonary surfactant deficiency but from a different perspective. Hamvas' research compares babies with normal lungs to those with abnormal lungs in an effort to find differences in surfactant production. He will study three groups: premature infants under one year old awaiting lung transplantation because of lung disease and infants under six months old with normal lungs who are on mechanical ventilation for other reasons. By measuring fluid production from each baby's windpipe or trachea, Hamvas aims to determine how surfactant is produced and used differently in the body of a baby with lung disease than in one with normal lungs.

His research could lead to treatments to restore lung function in infants with respiratory distress syndrome. Cole and Hamvas are physicians at St. Louis Children's Hospital.
Exhibitions


Wednesday, Feb. 6

7 p.m. in Steinberg Auditorium: "Tales from the True American Civil War: Events and Reflections." Presented by The Center for the Study of War and Conflict. Sponsored by the University Libraries. Room 100 Brown Hall. 935-6150.

Sunday, Feb. 10


Film

Wednesday, Feb. 6

7 p.m. in Steinberg Auditorium: "East Asian Studies and Public Policy: Pathways of Memory and Identity." To promote the arts, culture, and society in East Asia. Presented by The Center for the Study of War and Conflict. Sponsored by the University Libraries. Room 100 Brown Hall. 935-4523.

Friday, Feb. 8

9:15 a.m. in Room 426, McDonnell Medical Sciences Bldg.: "Interactions of Osteocytes and Osteoblasts." Presented by the Center for the Study of War and Conflict. Sponsored by the University Libraries. Room 100 Brown Hall. 935-4523.

Music

Thursday, Feb. 7

8-10 p.m. in Steinberg Auditorium: "Ptah." Presented by The Center for the Study of War and Conflict. Sponsored by the University Libraries. Room 100 Brown Hall. 935-6210.

Saturday, Feb. 9

3-5 p.m. in Steinberg Auditorium: "Ida" Presented by The Center for the Study of War and Conflict. Sponsored by the University Libraries. Room 100 Brown Hall. 935-6210.

Sunday, Feb. 10

2 p.m. in Steinberg Auditorium: "Die Fledermaus." Presented by The Center for the Study of War and Conflict. Sponsored by the University Libraries. Room 100 Brown Hall. 935-6210.
Poet Ni Chuilleanain is reading for Writing Program

**By Liam Ottens**

Poet Ni Chuilleanain, author of six collections and winner of the prestigious O’Sullivan Poetry Award from The Irish American Cultural Institute, will read from her work at Writing in Ireland, Jan. 31. The evening will follow the reading, and copies of Chuilleanain’s works will be available for purchase.

"Ni Chuilleanain is the most important woman poet writing in Ireland today," said Susan Guttin, Ph.D., assistant professor of English in Arts & Sciences. "As one scholar has recently noted, more than perhaps any other Irish writer she is at once familiar with what has been called the ‘hidden Ireland,’ with its links to Gaelic language, history and culture, and also with European culture at its most cosmopolitan."

"Where Javan Roland, a much better-known Irish poet, claims to speak as a subject for the women who have been made into objects by the poetry of Irish males, Ni Chuilleanain prefers to let those silenced by history as well as by art emerge as surcease but vividly real." Javan added, "The poetry of half-secret, half-revelations, is scupulous in its control of voice but also continuously startling."

Ni Chuilleanain was born in Cork in 1942, the daughter of a novelist, and a college professor. She graduated from University College Dublin in 1962, later studied at Oxford University and currently teaches at Trinity College in Dublin, where she founded and co-edits the literary journal Cyphers with husband MacDara Woods.

Ni Chuilleanain’s latest collection is The Girl Who Married the River, published in January by Wake Forest University Press. Previous books include The Serpent (1995); The Magdalene’s Tavern and Starter Poems (1989), named one of the three best poetry books of the year by the Irish Times; Her Lingua: Poetry Book Prize Committee; The Rose Ceremonies (1981); Site of Ambush (1975); and Acts and Manumissions (1966), winner of the Patrick Kavanagh Award. Recently, several of her works were anthologized in The Wade House Poetry Festival; Irish Women, 1967-2000. More information about the Feb. 7 reading, call 935-7130.

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**Swimming and diving**

Farrow well in own meet

Both the men and the women finished second in the 17th Annual St. Louis Invitational Jan. 26-27. Senior Linda Witter was 32nd in the 200 freestyle, and the freestyle relay, which are located just east of Steinberg in Bixby Sites. To register, call 747-0294.

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**Men's hoops continues best season ever**

The Bears beat the University of Rochester (65-48) Jan. 25 and Carnegie Mellon University (76-72) Jan. 27. The wins gave the men (17-7) sole possession and first place in the University, Athletic Association and the University, Athletics and Athletics, and 11-5 in the EIVA, win streak stays intact Washington U. continued its win streak at home with a 61-44 victory against Rochester Jan. 25 and a 70-44 win against Carnegie Mellon Jan. 27. The Bears, 16-4, have won six straight against perennial college basketball powerhouse. Hutchens scored a career-high 25 points against Juniata, and junior Jennifer Radic scored 12 points and nine rebounds against Carnegie Mellon.

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**University College rolls out Saturday Seminars**

Information session

Before the Feb. 9 lecture, an information session for those interested in learning more about the MLA and other master’s degree programs will be held at 10 a.m. in room 40 in Steinberg. Coffee and donuts will be provided.

professor of Asian and Near Eastern languages and literatures and chair of comparative literature, both in Arts & Sciences, will give a Feb. 9 lecture titled "Creating and Transferring Power in Africa." In Feb. 16 American Art: The Political Economy," in the series’ "Annual Update in the African Art and the School of Architecture, which she founded and teaches at Trinity College in Dublin, where she founded and co-edits the literary journal Cyphers with husband MacDara Woods. Ni Chuilleanain’s latest collection is The Girl Who Married the River, published in January by Wake Forest University Press. Previous books include The Serpent (1995); The Magdalene’s Tavern and Starter Poems (1989), named one of the three best poetry books of the year by the Irish Times; Her Lingua: Poetry Book Prize Committee; The Rose Ceremonies (1981); Site of Ambush (1975); and Acts and Manumissions (1966), winner of the Patrick Kavanagh Award. Recently, several of her works were anthologized in The Wade House Poetry Festival; Irish Women, 1967-2000. More information about the Feb. 7 reading, call 935-7130.

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For many students, the process of job hunting and looking for a job can be a daunting experience. However, the Career Center hopes to make this process easier for students with the launch of its annual Career Week.

Career Week, which begins on Feb. 4, consists of a variety of panels and programs aimed at helping students prepare for their future careers. This year's theme is "Exploring Different Career Paths," and the primary focus of the event will be to give students a chance to talk with representatives from different careers.

"We have a number of panels coming from an assortment of different fields," said Amy Simmons, project coordinator at the Career Center. "The program will enable students to explore numerous career paths that they may not have known existed.

The panels will discuss what they do, how they got started and how to get a job in that field. Simmons said, "They will offer suggestions and advice on the most effective strategies to achieve your goals.

Skill-building seminars will be offered on resume writing, networking, interviewing, understanding benefit packages and event planning. Students can then screen and negotiate an offer.

The culmination of the event will be the Internship Kaleidoscope, held from 2-3:30 p.m. Feb. 8 in McMillan Café in McMillan Hall. The kaleidoscope will include a multifaceted look at internships from a variety of perspectives - student, employer and faculty member. Students will have the opportunity to "spit pith," or to find an internship, and get advice from their peers.

A preview list of summer 2002 openings includes the following:

- "It should be a great event," said Simmons. "The workshops and the panel discussions are very well attended, and this year we have an excellent lineup of panelists.
- All events are free and open to all University students, but an RSVP is required for each event. For complete listing of all events, times and locations, contact the Career Center.
- For more information or to RSVP call 935-9590.

Gutenberg:

"from Page 1"

The 20th-century printing, but the Gutenberg leaf takes us back to the beginning of modern printing technology. A Gutenberg leaf is so diverse and engaging one of the libraries' already respected collections for a higher level.

The description of the Gutenberg is as one of the primary elements with the greatest cultural impact. It ranks along side the Latin and German edition of the Nuremberg Chronicle and Galileo's Discourse of 1632, both also historically known as Special Collections.

The timing of this acquisition comes just as Gutenberg is back in the news, as scholars debate the exact methods.

Gutenberg used for making his type.

"This is the beginning of typographic," said Kenneth E. Botnick, associate professor of graphic design in the School of Art and director of the Krannert Library.

"From a historical point of view, it is amazing that this process re-stated for hundreds of years. This leaf has helped my students understand the power of the typographic identification and its importance to literature.

"I'm a printmaker, so I have something that speaks to my own.

"On my students to see firsthand how dramatically typographic imaging has changed over the past 500 years is pretty remarkable. It's all major, major acquisition."
H. Mitchell Perry Jr., professor emeritus of medicine, 78

By GIL Z. RICKES

H. Mitchell Perry Jr., M.D., professor emeritus of medicine in the School of Medicine, died of complications from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma on Jan. 2, 2002, at his home in Town & Country, Mo. He was 78.

A specialist on hypertension and stroke, Perry continued his research in the School of Medicine after retiring as director of the Department of Medicine in the early 1990s. He served as a physician coordinator for the National Veterans Administration Hypertension Program and as director of the Department of Hypertension Screening and Treatment Program of Department of Veterans' Affairs' Clinics in Washington, D.C.

In the early 1950s, Perry was a member of the first American group to succeed in medically treating hypertension. More recently, he and colleagues discovered that using drugs to lower synthetic blood pressure significantly reduced the risk of stroke. "Mitch consistently exuded a high level of excitement about his opportunity to contribute to basic research and understanding of treatment of high blood pressure," said Larry F. Fields, M.D., assistant professor of medicine and president and chief executive officer of Saint Louis University Connect,' he also directed the epidemiology department in an area that impacts a high percentage of Americans."

In collaboration with foundations such as the World Health Organization, Perry traveled the globe with his wife, Betty, in efforts to provide effective environmental factors in areas where poverty may influence the risk of hypertension and stroke. By studying populations at home and abroad, he played a key role in identifying a southeastern region in the United States with higher rates of stroke associated with hypertension, an area now known as the "stroke belt." Born in 1923 in Reading, Pa., Perry studied at Swarthmore College and earned a medical degree and a master's degree in 1950. He later served in the army Medical Corps and did biochemistry research on nerve gas in the Army Chemical Corps.

In addition to Betty, his wife of 56 years, Perry is survived by their daughter, Horace M. "Mike" Perry, chief executive officer of A&H Country, Clayton R. Perry, M.D., of St. Louis, Heather E. O'Keefe, M.D., of South Portland, Maine, and Holly E. Perry, M.D., of South Pasadena, Calif. Services are being handled by Casswell Funeral Home in St. Louis. Contributions may be made to the American Diabetes Association or the National Stroke Association.

To press

A paper by Christopher I. Byrne, Ph.D., dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Science and the Edward H. and Grace Miriam Lewis Professor of Systems Science and Mathematics, and two co-authors, which appeared in the latest issue of the SIAM (Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics) Review, received high praise from the journals editors. The paper was titled "From Finite Covariance Windows to Modeling Filters: A Context Optimization Approach." Among SIAM Review colleagues, "the authors have gone out of their way to relate their mathematical developments to practical consequences, and to bring theory to life through well-chosen examples."

Of note

William J. Powers, M.D., professor of neurology and of radiology in the School of Medicine, has received a two-year, $100,000 grant from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke for research on "Climbing Cells and the Pathophysiology of Acute Brain Injury." Terry Hoyk, a second-year student in the George Wrenn Program of Social Work, was selected for a Pediatric Pulmonary Social Work Fellowship for summer 2002 at the University of Florida Medical Center in Gainesville, Florida. She will be part of an interdisciplinary team working with children with cystic fibrosis, life-threatening asthma, and other pulmonary diseases.

Eight gerontology concentration students in the George Wrenn Brown School of Social Work received Hartford Practicum Scholarships for 2002 and 2003. They are Natela Phaideladze, Open Society Institute fellow; James Kettel, Mark Zavada, Tiana Cloud, Ashley Brooks, Leon Catron, Leslie Kittinger and Meredith Nassif.

Jeffrey L. Gordon, M.D., the Alexander Everett Professor of Molecular Biology and Pharmacology and professor of medicine in the School of Medicine, has received a five-year, $1,925,913 grant from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases for research titled "Regulation of Gene Expression in the Small Intestine."" Emil R. Unanue, M.D., the Edward H. and Grace Miriam Lewis Professor of Pathology and Immunology in the School of Medicine, has received a five-year, $3,252,323 grant from the National Cancer Institute for research titled "Training in Cancer Biology and Immunology." Lynn Stockman Emeritus, assistant athletic director and women's tennis coach, was named a 2001 Woman of Worth by the Older Women's League (OWL) in recognition of her ongoing efforts to enhance the opportunities for girls and women in sport and as a role model for female coaches and administrators.

Margaret Perkinson, Ph.D., an associate professor in occupational therapy in the School of Medicine, recently was elected to serve a two-year term as president of the Association for Rehabilitation Research in Occupational Science, an international organization of scientists and practitioners aging in various cultural contexts.

Carl F. Clark, Ph.D., and the Eliot Michael Director and associate professor of occupational therapy in the School of Medicine, recently received a Community Recognition Award from Home Services Inc. on behalf of the faculty and students of the occupational therapy program. Home Services is a non-profit agency serving the St. Louis area and the general public who provide expertise in helping people live independently in their daily lives.

Editor's note

At press time, it was learned that Jeffrey L. Gordon, Ph.D., professor emeritus of psychology in Arts & Sciences, was diagnosed with a terminal illness. It also was learned that recent University of Hartford-Ray Dickson died Jan. 30. Obituaries will be published in the Feb. 8 Record.

Presidential Bush names Dresser to bioethics council

Rebecca S. Dresser, JD, the Daniel Noyes Kirby Professor of Law and professor of ethics in the School of Medicine, was named to the President's Council on Bioethics.

Dresser is one of 17 attorneys, academicians and physicians chosen by President George W. Bush to be a part of the new council that will address issues such as euthanasia, assisted reproduction and embryonic stem cell research.

"The appointment is a major honor and opportunity, but also a major challenge and responsibility," Dresser said. "The council should speak to people with differing values and perspectives, and to ordinary people as well as policy officials and physicians."

"I hope that I can contribute to discussions and reports that help people reach their own judgments about appropriate professional and personal responses to ongoing scientific and medical developments."

The council held its opening meeting last week and council members reviewed four working papers on human cloning.

Campus Authors

Annette M. Veech, Ph.D., senior lecturer of business communications in the Olin School of Business

Managerial Communication Strategies: An Applied Casebook

(Praeger, 830 Pages, $24.95, paper)

Managers face unexpected communication challenges every day. It isn't enough to write and speak well; managers must also be able to navigate difficult situations and influence people. Managers select strategies for resolving daily challenges.

Experiencing many of these scenarios herself in the corporate sector as a management consultant, Veech understands firsthand the need for realistic cases in business communications to help managers become better leaders. Strategic thinking for solving cases and real-world sample solutions are included in this casebook.


The recent release is available at the Campus Bookstore in Mallinckrodt Student Center on the Hilltop Campus. For more information, call 935-5580.
Hunting viruses, training future scientists

Research by Herbert W. “Skip” Virgin, M.D., Ph.D., Ph.D., seeks to understand disease

by Darrell E. Ward

Viruses manipulate the immune system during chronic infection. The extent was not known until exciting and satisfying moments in Virgin’s career as a researcher and teacher in the School of Medicine. Virgin attended Washington University in 1991 from Harvard University, where he tested out of his freshman year, and earned magna cum laude in 1977 and entered Harvard Medical School’s M.D./Ph.D. program under Emil R. Unanue, M.D.

Today, Unanue is the Edward Mallinckrodt Professor and head of the Department of Pathology and Immunology at Washington University School of Medicine. After medical school, Virgin entered Harvard’s research residency program at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, followed by a fellowship in infectious diseases, which brought him to Washington University. He held a clinical appointment in medicine until 1996, when he made the difficult decision to give up clinical medicine and devote himself solely to research.

Even in middle school, though, Virgin knew that he wanted to be a doctor or scientist. He grew up in southern Florida going to school, spearfishing and sailing. He comes from a sailing family, and his proficiency earned him the nickname “Skipper.” He still sails during family visits to southern Florida.

Virgin’s father was a trial attorney, and his mother was trained in chemistry. His grandfather, an orthopedic surgeon, regularly sought better ways to care for his patients. During the summer after his junior year in high school, Virgin received a fellowship from the American Heart Association that placed him in a chemistry lab at the University of Miami. There he explored whether it was possible to change the wavelengths at which certain chemicals fluoresced by fixing them to solid surfaces. By the end of the summer, he’d presented it at a scientific conference.

“That solidified my interest in science,” he said.

Upon entering Harvard, he first attended, then taught, biology classes. The experience cut short — temporarily — his desire to enter medicine.

“Biology didn’t seem intellectually challenging. There was too much memorizing facts and not enough thinking about concepts. I thought if that’s what biology is like, that’s what medicine must be also, and I lost interest in it completely.”

He did enjoy teaching and research, however, and he became involved in a study of algae molds, a kind of fungus that crowds around like amoebas and eats bacteria. “I wanted to learn how these amoeboid cells moved amoeba-like through the body hunting bacteria and other pathogens.” This context of the immune system re-kindled his interest in medicine and led him to enter the M.D./Ph.D. programs.

Another interest was ignited during this time, too. One night he and some friends went to a restaurant to listen to a yuppy band. They ended up sharing a table with another group of young people they’d known from high school. Virgin began talking with the woman at the other table and introduced her to his friend, Joanne Downey. They’d met once before, formally, at a ceremony where Virgin, president of the National Honor Society’s local chapter, had placed the society’s pin on Downey, the new inductee.

Downey left impressed by their discussions. “We talked about the bacterium E. coli. I’d never had a dinner conversation with someone shorter, black, and afterward, I went home thinking, ‘That was really nice.’” Both were admitted to Harvard Medical School. They married after their first year, and graduated together. Today, Downey is assistant professor of pediatrics, director of the labor and delivery service at Barnes Jewish Hospital, pediatric director of the nursery at Barnes, and director of the antenatal consult service, which cares for women with pregnancies involving abnormal fetuses.

At Harvard, Virgin did his research under the guidance of Unanue, studying the immune response to a bacterial pathogen.

But to truly understand a disease, Virgin decided he needed a pathogen he could genetically manipulate, something difficult to do with bacteria. So he switched to viruses, working with Bernard Fields, M.D., at Harvard. He then went to Washington University with a joint appointment in medicine and in immunology and virology. “Skip has successfully combined molecular virology with immunobiology,” Unanue said. “Very few investigators can bridge both areas. In a relatively short time, he has become one of the top viral immunologists in the country. He is highly committed to his laboratory, to his trainees and to our department.”

Virgin’s long-time friend and colleague, Paul M. Allen, Ph.D., the Robert L. Kron Professor of Pathology and Immunology, described him as having a true passion for science. “Skip loves doing basic bench work,” Allen said. “Every day, he finds time to do experiments. He’s competitive in a friendly way and can identify the critical questions and figure out ways to answer them.” In addition, said Allen, “he’s a good parent.” Virgin and Downey have three children, White, N, Bre, and Jaelithe. 4. Virgin relays this by taking his kids to soccer and basketball games, and he’s an assistant coach for his son’s basketball team. He also enjoys reading serious science fiction, books that help him understand in science by writers such as Greg Bear, Gregory Benford and Isaac Asimov. As a child, he read the Lord of the Rings times — and as an adult, he enjoyed the movie.

Integrating work and family is important to Virgin, both at home and at work. His laboratory includes areas for toddlers and for nursing mothers. Virgin wants his kids involved. Among the most satisfying aspects of his job, he said, is seeing the men and women trained in his lab do well. “Skip has a clear track record for recruiting and retaining women in scientific careers,” Downey said. “Virgin’s been a mentor for the last year and he received the Academic Women’s Network Mentorship Award. That’s something important, he said, because training young people well is a service to humanity.”

“I'm a good mentor,” he said. “We always take care of the women they'd known from high school. Virgin and Downey left impressed by their discussion. "We talked about the bacterium E. coli. I'd never had a dinner conversation with someone shorter, black, and afterward, I went home thinking, 'That was really nice.'" Both were admitted to Harvard Medical School. They married after their first year, and graduated together. Today, Downey is assistant professor of pediatrics, director of the labor and delivery service at Barnes Jewish Hospital, pediatric director of the nursery at Barnes, and director of the antenatal consult service, which cares for women with pregnancies involving abnormal fetuses.

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Currently, some of his postdoctoral students are venturing with him into risky scientific territory. Virgin recently directed his work toward isolating new pathogens from tissues of patients with diseases that appear infectious but have no known link to a virus. "Pathogenic discovery requires that you look hard and perhaps find nothing," he said. "But such efforts are important for advancing understanding of the role of viruses in human disease. Undoubtedly, Skip Virgin is the right person for the job."