

Recollections on the Inception of The
Department of Pharmacology in 1968
at Penn State's College of Medicine

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May
Here it is!
Please make
any suggestions
you wish.
Thanks
Eve

My recollections of my initial experiences in this institution cover the key items that Dr. Evarts requested be included in this narrative. Accordingly, I shall focus my reflections on these first events since they explain how I became part of this institution, what constituted truly significant change and had lasting impact, as well as a few interesting anecdotes and interactions with the rest of the University.

The founding dean, George T. Harrell, invited me to visit Hershey in the summer of 1967 as a candidate for the Chair of Pharmacology. I was then Head of a Section on Pharmacogenetics in the Laboratory of Chemical Pharmacology at NIH. The Director of that laboratory in the Heart Institute, Bernard B. Brodie, was a world-famous pharmacologist who had mentioned my name to Dr. Harrell because of my innovative work on the genetic control of large variations among normal human subjects in drug responses. They were studies conducted *in vivo* on rates of drug metabolism in normal identical and fraternal twins. I had previously received my undergraduate, medical and residency training at Harvard and had also worked for several years in human biochemical genetics at Rockefeller University where I had made a very lucky discovery in Henry Kunkel's laboratory on the existence of multiple molecular forms of enzymes. This occurred just prior to the coining of the term "isozyme" and the recognition that these different forms could subserve different functions in the cell. These observations were widely acclaimed and published after they were initially dismissed as artifactual. I even received

several awards for them. I was just 33 years old in 1967 and several things about me appealed to Dr. Harrell as a potential Chair of Pharmacology. Firstly, he liked my youthful enthusiasm. Secondly, he admired my capacity for hard work. Thirdly, he was impressed with my scientific background, discoveries and awards. Fourthly, he was looking for someone as chair who was flexible and who had not developed fixed ideas about the primary missions of education and research through previous experience as a chair elsewhere. Such prior experience Dr. Harrell thought might have led to fixed ideas and rigidity. Also, he felt that relative inexperience would lead to more adaptability and innovation in undertaking administrative responsibilities and developing new ideas. Fifthly, Dr. Harrell believed strongly in medicine as an art as well as a science. He admired my interest in literature and especially the fine arts and the Hudson River School.

Dr. Harrell and I got on exceedingly well. We genuinely liked each other. As he said, we had similar approaches and “philosophies” about medical education. There was mutual respect, and I regarded him as my friend, mentor and advisor. He seemed to me a respected father figure who always wanted the best for me, the department, and the College of Medicine. I recall vividly the fine dinner in June of 1967 at the Hotel Hershey with the Harrells, Langs, Mungers, Morgans, and Davidsons. Most had similar backgrounds, ideas, and ideals. Committed to the highest standards of excellence in education and research, we were determined to make Penn State’s College of Medicine one of the truly outstanding schools of medicine in the country.

We were all attracted by the same opportunity to build the best basic science departments possible. To accomplish this, we were amazingly free and unrestrained. The old traditions and restrictions that prevailed in the medical schools where we had been trained and prior faculty members simply didn't apply here. Penn State University had given George and us freedom to build as we wanted. This then was a unique chance to make our dreams come true.

In the summer of 1967, I spent three days in Hershey, including a trip in the Penn State airplane to visit University Park. I met Eric Walker, then Penn State President, and also several professors of genetics including Jim Wright and Ed Buss. My work entailed genetics and I needed to interact closely with the genetics program at University Park. Everyone was remarkably encouraging and supportive of me and my ideas. We developed a cooperative genetics training and research program between University Park and Hershey. Dr. Harrell sent me a three-page letter of offer. I hesitated. I was in the midst of a very active research program at NIH. At NIH, scientific resources abounded. There were 10,000 workers; buildings were everywhere on the campus. Here at Hershey, Dr. Harrell sat in an antiquated office in an old farmhouse, Long Lane. Although he had detailed blueprints for a beautiful medical building, nothing had yet materialized. I wondered when the initial building would commence and when it would be completed so the teaching and research could get underway.

I recall vividly visiting Evan Pattishall, the Founding Chair of our Department of Behavioral Science. His office was on the second floor of Long Lane. Outside his window, I watched, fascinated, as the breezes blew beautiful patterns in the wheat fields. Would Hershey,

ever be transformed from such glorious fields into an actual medical school with real buildings? I decided to wait and see.

One year later, this transformation had begun. The basic science wing was begun in the summer of 1968. In July of 1968, I accepted the offer initially made one year earlier and started commuting from NIH to give a course in pharmacology to the first class which had matriculated in 1967 and had just reached the second year where pharmacology was traditionally taught. There were slightly above thirty students. They crammed into the old L303 lecture room, since the four larger lecture halls were not yet ready. All seats were taken. Some faculty also attended to see what the new Pharmacology Chair was like. It was very warm in the room and a little wild. One student asked, "Is that just in rats?" "No," I assured him, "It applied as well to humans." The initial students were very mature and serious. Later, we calculated that on average they were two years older than subsequent classes.

I had hired several NIH associates, first Walter Severs, then Jack Connor and Frank Greene, all professional pharmacologists, to join this department and help teach the course. They were outstanding faculty members, excellent in both teaching and research. Each remained in this department for 25 to 30 years, receiving numerous NIH grants to support their innovative research. During 32 years, we graduated more than 100 students in pharmacology.

Of all the dramatic changes I have witnessed at this College of Medicine, the transformation in 1967 to 1968 from an alfalfa field to a glorious building ideally designed and structured for research and teaching purposes was of one of the truly most impressive

developments in the whole history of our institution. This transformation helped to convince me to leave the security of NIH to pursue a much less certain scientific and educational career in Hershey. I am still glad I made that decision. It turned out well for me.

Finally, a word about the unusual philosophy which led me to select faculty for the Department of Pharmacology and which I believe helped to make this a strong, resilient, and enduring department. Unlike the individual laboratories I had worked in and observed at Rockefeller University and NIH where the laboratory chief alone determined the particular subject of research and hired staff mainly to work on only a single area, I purposely selected young individual investigators from different and diverse areas of pharmacology. Dedication, ingenuity, prior training and tangible evidence of previous research success and productivity were required. The specific area of pharmacological research was much less important to me than the quality and character of the individual candidate. Accordingly, the guiding principle for the long-range development of this department arose from my conviction that investigators representing diverse scholarly interests can best strengthen and challenge each other. Thus, the product of research and teaching for the group becomes much more than the sum of its individual parts. This vision has been realized by the multiple collaborations and interactions not only within this department, but among this department and other departments of this college, and among this department and other colleges in the University.

Long life to our College of Medicine! May it not only survive, but prosper and continue to be a leading light for progress in medical research and education, both nationally and internationally. I have greatly enjoyed my 32 years here as Chair of Pharmacology and wish my