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American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) Mourns the Loss of Founding President and Genetics Pioneer David L. Rimoïn, MD, PhD, FACMG

BETHESDA, MARYLAND - May 30, 2012 | After a career that spanned nearly half a century, Dr. David L. Rimoïn, founding president of ACMG and in many ways the founder of one of the most fast-paced specialties in modern clinical medicine, passed away on Sunday May 27, 2012 in Los Angeles of pancreatic cancer, which had only been diagnosed a few days before.

Dr. Rimoïn was a giant in the field of medical genetics. He leaves not only an enduring legacy but also a void in the hearts of the many who loved him, including his beloved wife Ann of 32 years and their three cherished children, Anne, Michael and Lauren.

As founding president of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics, Dr. Rimoïn set the organization on the path to becoming the leading organization in medical genetics and genomics today. As a visionary, admired teacher, prolific author, mentor, beloved friend, researcher and skilled and caring physician for five decades, Dr. Rimoïn touched the lives of generations of patients as well as trainees and colleagues.

Born in 1936 in Montreal, Canada, Dr. Rimoïn followed his childhood dream of becoming a doctor.

“Ever since I was four or five years old I wanted to be a doctor,” he said when he learned that ACMG was presenting him with the ACMG Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010. “There was nobody in my family that had been in medicine and in fact no one had gone to college.”

Dr. Rimoïn excelled at McGill University, where he earned his bachelor’s degree with honors in genetics in 1957, and his MD and MSc in 1961. He then earned his doctorate in human genetics from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he was recruited by the late Dr. Victor McKusick, in a phone call he said he would never forget.

“I started an internship in internal medicine at McGill and I was standing over a child dying of cystic fibrosis one day and I get a call from Victor McKusick. I thought someone was pulling my leg because he was the most famous person in genetics.

“He said, ‘I’ve heard about you and I want you to come work with me,’” Dr. Rimoïn had recalled.

What followed was a long and distinguished career of research, teaching and leadership in genetics, during which he helped organize his profession into an independent medical specialty and founded the ACMG.

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“It was a chance to get medical geneticists recognized as experts in the field, to push for funding and changes in health insurance, to transform a new science into a medical specialty and to bring people together to share ideas and to encourage young people to go into training programs to increase the number of medical geneticists.”

Dr. Rimoin was best known scientifically for his research on short stature, skeletal dysplasias and heritable disorders of connective tissue. He was 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.

“For those of us in his local UCLA/Cedars-Sinai family, the sudden and unexpected loss of our patriarch is absolutely devastating,” said ACMG President Wayne Grody, MD, PhD, FACMG. “But this is no less true for those in his extended ACMG/Medical Genetics family, whose lives he influenced both collectively and individually.”

Grody added, “For most of the formative years of our specialty, David was the face of medical genetics to the rest of organized medicine and to the public. Yet he lavished the same passionate devotion on the personal level to each of the countless trainees he mentored and the patients he cared for.”

Dr. Rimoin gave back to his profession as a leader in a remarkable number of scholarly and patient advocacy organizations. He was the founding president of the American Board of Medical Genetics (1979–1983), the founding president of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (1992–1998) and then of the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine where he also later served on the Board for nearly 20 years. He also served on The National Foundation of The March of Dimes and on the Medical Advisory Board of the National Foundation for Jewish Genetic Diseases, amongst many other organizations.

Dr. Rimoin was responsible for the creation of the Medical Genetics Clinic at the Barnes and Children’s Hospitals in St. Louis, the Division of Medical Genetics in the Departments of Medicine and Pediatrics at Harbor-UCLA, and the Medical Genetics Institute at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. He was also the director of the UCLA Intercampus Genetics Postdoctoral program. Dr. Rimoin was also Director of the International Skeletal Dysplasia Registry, the largest such registry in the world.

“Dave was one of those rare visionary leaders,” said Michael S. Watson, PhD, FACMG, executive director of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics. “He has led the research arm of human genetics and the founding of both the certification/accreditation and practice arms of Medical Genetics. Well before most others, he knew the field would grow in impact and depth to stand on its own among medical specialties. His friendship and wisdom will be greatly missed.”

Dr. Rimoin’s contributions to medicine were profound and were recognized by numerous awards throughout his long career. Most recently, he was presented the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award at its 2010 Annual Meeting. His other awards included the March of Dimes Colonel Harland Sanders Award for Lifetime Achievement in Genetics Sciences, a Doctor of Humane Letters (honoris causa) from the Finch University of Health Sciences, the Pioneer in Medicine Award from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, and he was a member of the Institute of Medicine.

He also served on a great number of editorial boards, including *Metabolism*, the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, the *American Journal of Medical Genetics*, the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *Human Genetics*, *Diabetes*, *Endocrinologia Clinica y Metabolismo*, *Journal of Clinical Dysmorphology*, *Human Heredity*, *International Journal of Human & Medical Genetics*, and the *Journal of Perinatology*.

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The President of the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine Bruce R. Korf, MD, PhD, FACMG said, “The current generation of medical geneticists looked to Dr. Rimoin as a mentor and a pioneer who launched our field on its present day course at the center of all of medicine. We can barely fathom the impact of his loss, not only because it was so unexpected but also because of how profoundly we will miss both his humanity and wisdom.”

In a 2002 interview for the Oral History of Human Genetics Collection, Dr. Rimoin said, in reflecting on his career, “My own contribution? Oh, I think I made some contributions in terms of my own individual research. I think I made contributions to people I’ve loved, made contributions in training young people, and developing the training programs have been extremely important. I’ve enjoyed producing a book and making it available to people. And what I really enjoy is putting people together and making these organizations work and making genetics a true specialty, which I’ve been fortunate to play a part in. That is, being able to really bring people together and make things happen has been very satisfying.”

Known as a kind and humble gentle man, proud father and also for a fine sense of humor, he leaves a tremendous void not only in our profession but also in our hearts.

About the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics and The ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine

Founded in 1991, the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (www.acmg.net) advances the practice of medical genetics by providing education, resources and a voice for more nearly 1600 biochemical, clinical, cytogenetic, medical and molecular geneticists, genetic counselors and other healthcare professionals committed to the practice of medical genetics and genomics. ACMG’s activities include the development of laboratory and practice standards and guidelines, advocating for quality genetic services in healthcare and in public health, and promoting the development of methods to diagnose, treat and prevent genetic disease. *Genetics in Medicine*, published monthly, is the official ACMG peer-reviewed journal. ACMG’s website (www.acmg.net) offers a variety of resources including Policy Statements, Practice Guidelines, Educational Resources, and a Find a Geneticist tool. The educational and public health programs of the American College of Medical Genetics are dependent upon charitable gifts from corporations, foundations, and individuals. The ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine (www.acmgfoundation.org), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is a community of supporters and contributors who understand the importance of medical genetics and genomics and genetic counseling in healthcare. Established in 1992, the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine supports the American College of Medical Genetics’ mission to “translate genes into health” by raising funds to promote the profession of medical genetics and genomics to medical students, to support the development of practice guidelines for practicing physicians, to advance the awareness and understanding of medical genetics and genomics in the general public, and much more.

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