



American College of Medical Genetics Foundation

ACMG NEWS **For Immediate Release**

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Preeminent Geneticist and Pediatrician Dr. R. Rodney Howell Receives Lifetime Achievement Award from the ACMG Foundation

BETHESDA, MD—March 30, 2012 | R. Rodney Howell, MD, FACMG, is the recipient of the 2012 American College of Medical Genetics (ACMG) Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award. Dr. Howell is Professor of Pediatrics and Chairman Emeritus at the Miller School of Medicine at the University of Miami.

Dr. Howell, president of the American College of Medical Genetics Foundation, was honored for his lifelong commitment and work in the field of pediatrics and genetic research and for his role and leadership in the development and advancement of newborn screening.

“Dr. Howell really is a champion of Newborn Screening,” said Dr. Duane Alexander, M.D., the former Director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development when Dr. Howell served as the Senior Advisor to the Director from 2004 to 2011, a time when the Institute’s research was focused on newborn screening.

“He has been the leader in that area of pediatrics ever since the 1960s. He was an outstanding pediatrician and advocate for children as well,” Alexander said, who noted that in addition to his work in genetics and newborn screening, Dr. Howell served as the chairman of the departments of pediatrics at both the University of Texas Medical School at Houston and the University of Miami.

“It’s always great to have someone recognize some of the things you have been involved with,” Dr. Howell said of receiving the award. “That fact that I have been involved with the College, and that the College has grown vastly beyond its start, and is really making a difference, all goes a long way into making me pleased that the College and the Foundation has seen fit to recognize some of the things I have been involved with.”

Born in the small town of Concord, North Carolina, Dr. Howell, 80, worked in a small machine shop owned by his father and, before graduating high school, was a master-machinist. Dr. Howell said that he passed on many “really good job offers,” as a machinist and opted instead to enroll in Davidson College where he first became interested in medicine.

Following his graduation from undergraduate school, Dr. Howell attended medical school at Duke University where his passion for caring for children was first formed.

“At Duke, I was surrounded by terrific teachers,” Dr. Howell said. “I became interested in inherited metabolic disorders. It was clear these problems were focused in pediatrics. I also became aware that internal medicine, the other discipline I strongly considered, took care largely of older people. In pediatrics you took care of young folks and your work really made an early difference.”

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Dr. Howell, followed his passion for genetics and pediatrics, and after his pediatric residency he participated in a fellowship in genetics at Duke under the direction of Dr. James B. Wyngaarden. “This sealed my career in Genetics,” Dr. Howell said.

In 2007 Dr. Howell was recognized with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Duke University Medical Alumni Association.

Pursuing a career path as both a doctor and a geneticist, Dr. Howell also became a teacher and mentor to many young medical students and a skilled administrator who could meld the views of many into an accepted consensus. He has been a leader of many causes, most notably as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

But it is in the field of pediatrics and genetics where Dr. Howell has done the most good.

“Dr. Howell is one of those people who always tries to do the right thing for the right reasons,” said Dr. Daniel Armstrong, a professor and associate chair and Director of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Miami.

“And he has also blended a career that has been able to bridge the development of the field of genetics along with the development and transition of the field of pediatrics and children’s health. When Rod started his career, we were still within the era of vaccinations and managing infectious disease.

“What people don’t get is a good picture of Rod that he is one of the strongest advocates for children that I think I know anywhere and he does that in a way that is really important.” Dr. Armstrong said Dr. Howell supported the efforts of congress and kept in touch with “influential lawmakers so that they know that there are people out there who support them who are also huge advocates for children,” Dr. Armstrong said.

“I asked him one time why he put some much time and energy into that and he said ‘It’s really simple. Children can’t vote. And they need people who can vote to stand up for them.’ And that’s really been a picture that Rod does behind the scenes but is incredibly effectively on behalf of kids.”

Dr. Armstrong is not the only one who has been affected by Dr. Howell’s commitment to children. Dr. Michele Lloyd-Puryear, M.D., Ph.D, worked with Dr. Howell on The Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Hereditary Disorders in Newborns and Children and said, “Dr. Howell was very good at bringing differing opinions together and forming a consensus.”

In the United States today, nearly 95 percent of the 4.1 million children born each year are screened for some 30 genetic disorders through the government-funded program. Dr. Lloyd-Puryear credits Dr. Howell’s work on The Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Hereditary Disorders in Newborns and Children and the work of the ACMG for accomplishing that.

“No matter if you’re rich or poor, if you can pay or not, if you have insurance or not, it gets paid for. Dr. Howell did that. I once asked him about screening for something and doing it in a clinical setting and he said that if you do that then it won’t be universal and there will be kids left out of it, and that was always where he began,” she said.

“That was the principle he acted on, what was right for a child. That always impressed me. He firmly believed in it and acted accordingly. It is certainly why he was a doctor, why he was a pediatrician. It seemed to be his driving force. Ego didn’t get in the way of that. It was never about him. It was about kids.”

A committee of past presidents of the American College of Medical Genetics selects the recipient of The ACMG Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award.

About the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics and the ACMG Foundation

The ACMG Foundation (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 supports the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics' mission to "translate genes into health" by raising funds to promote the profession of medical genetics and genomics to medical students, to fund the training of future medical geneticists, to support best-practices and tools for practicing physicians and laboratory directors, to promote awareness and understanding of our work in the general public, and much more.

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 than 1400 biochemical, clinical, cytogenetic, medical and molecular geneticists, genetic counselors and other healthcare professionals committed to the practice of medical genetics. 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 variety of resources including Policy Statements, Practice Guidelines, Educational Resources, and a Medical Geneticist Locator. The educational and public health programs of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics are dependent upon charitable gifts from corporations, foundations, and individuals.

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