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Renowned Geneticist and Pediatrician Dr. R. Rodney Howell Receives Inaugural Dr. Michael S. Watson Genetic and Genomic Medicine Innovation Award from the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine

BETHESDA, MD – March 18, 2020 | R. Rodney Howell, MD, FAAP, FACMG, emeritus professor and chairman of pediatrics, as well as emeritus member of the Hussman Institute for Human Genomics at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, is the inaugural recipient of the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine's Dr. Michael S. Watson Genetic and Genomic Medicine Innovation Award—the "Watson Award"—named for the American College of Medical Genetics' (ACMG) first and longstanding executive director, Dr. Michael Watson, FACMG.

"I was thrilled to be nominated for this award and deeply moved to receive it, particularly when I learned I was chosen because of my influence on public policy regarding medical genetics and genomics through advocacy, legislative means, or community collaboration, all of which have been a key focus for my work in recent decades," said Dr. Howell. "ACMG has been at the center of these activities and it has been wonderful to work with this team of the very best in the field towards the same goals."

"We are excited to announce that Dr. Rodney Howell is the recipient of the first Dr. Michael S. Watson Genetic and Genomic Medicine Innovation Award," said Bruce R. Korf, MD, PhD, FACMG, president of the ACMG Foundation. "Dr. Howell's pioneering work in newborn screening has probably touched more lives and helped more children than any other advance in genetic and genomic medicine in many decades. In addition, he has played a pivotal role in the founding of the College and in bringing Dr. Watson on board as the first executive director. It is our honor to recognize his many innovations in medical genetics and genomics as the first recipient of this award."

"Dr. Rodney Howell's work has, literally speaking, saved children's lives in the US and around the world," said Max Muenke, MD, FACMG, CEO of the ACMG. "Dr. Howell is a sought-after lecturer in the US and internationally where he continues to help set up and/or expand newborn screening. I am delighted that Dr. Howell's work that has made a difference in children's lives is recognized by the inaugural Dr. Michael S. Watson Genetic and Genomic Medicine Innovation Award."

Born in the small town of Concord, North Carolina, Dr. Howell first became interested in metabolic disorders and pediatrics while he was a medical student at Duke University.

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Following his internship and residency in pediatrics at Duke University Medical Center, he completed a research fellowship under the direction of James B. Wyngaarden, MD, who later became director of the National Institutes of Health and who inspired Dr. Howell's eventual career in genetics.

Dr. Howell spent four years on the staff at the National Institutes of Health before he was appointed Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Scholar in Mental Retardation and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Later, he became the David R. Park Professor and Chairman of Pediatrics at the University of Texas Medical School in Houston, and then Chair of Pediatrics at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. He is an elected fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and he is the author of more than 150 original articles, numerous abstracts, and other material dealing with serious genetic diseases in childhood.

Most of Dr. Howell's recent work has focused on newborn screening. He served as founding chair from 2004 to 2011 of the congressionally-mandated Secretary's Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children, the committee that oversaw development of the Recommended Uniform Screening Panel for the United States and advises the Secretary of Health and Human Services on issues concerning genetic testing in children, particularly newborn screening. During this same period, Dr. Howell was senior advisor to the director of the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. In 2013, he testified before the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Subcommittee on Children and Families on the past, present and future of newborn screening.

He has also served the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) for more than 30 years, first as a member of the Medical Advisory Committee, then as Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee, and most recently as Chairman of the MDA Board of Directors from 2007 to 2020.

In 2012, the ACMG Foundation honored Dr. Howell with its Lifetime Achievement Award. Dr. Howell also received the William G. Anlyan MD Lifetime Achievement Award from the Duke University Medical Alumni Association, the March of Dimes Col. Harland D. Sanders Lifetime Achievement Award in Genetics, and in 2013 the US Food and Drug Administration named him one of the agency's 30 Rare Disease Heroes.

The Watson Award recognizes those who have demonstrated innovation in their work and developed or implemented a new concept, method or idea that has had significant impact on genetic and genomic medicine. The award was created to honor the role Dr. Watson played during his nearly 20 years at the helm of ACMG while the field of genetic and genomic medicine emerged and evolved into the far-reaching practice it is today, a period during which Dr. Watson helped ACMG assume its position at the forefront of policy and guideline development.

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About the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine

The ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is a community of supporters and contributors who understand the importance of medical genetics and genomics in healthcare. Established in 1992, the ACMG Foundation supports the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) mission to “translate genes into health.” Through its work, the ACMG Foundation fosters charitable giving, promotes training opportunities to attract future medical geneticists and genetic counselors to the field, shares information about medical genetics and genomics, and sponsors important research. To learn more and support the ACMG Foundation mission to create “Better Health through Genetics” visit www.acmgfoundation.org.

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