

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

DENNIS A. CARSON

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Ted Everson

at

San Diego, California

on

12 March 2006

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program
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Dennis A. Carson
Dennis A. Carson, M.D.

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DENNIS A. CARSON

1936 Born in New York, New York on 31 May

Education

1966 B.A., history, Haverford College
1970 M.D., Columbia University

Professional Experience

1970-1972 University of California, San Diego
Resident, Internal Medicine
1974-1975 Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Medicine
1988-1990 Adjunct Professor, Department of Medicine
1990-present Professor of Medicine, Department of Medicine
1990-2003 Director, The Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging

1972-1974 National Institutes of Health
Clinical Associate, Section on Chemical Immunology, Arthritis
and Rheumatism Branch, National Institute of Arthritis,
Metabolism, and Digestive Disease

1976-1980 Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation
Assistant Member, Department of Clinical Research
1980-1986 Associate Member, Department of Basic and Clinical Research
1986-1990 Member, Department of Basic and Clinical Research

2003-present University of California, San Diego Medical Center
Director, Moores Cancer Center
2003-present Chugai Pharmaceutical Chair in Cancer
2003-present Associate Dean for Health Sciences

Honors

1966 Phi Beta Kappa
1966 Cope Fellowship
1970 Alpha Omega Alpha
1987 Lee C. Howley, Sr., Prize for Arthritis Research
1995 Elected member, American Academy of Arts and Sciences

1995 Sc.D. (Honorary), University of Aix-Marseille
2002 International Rheumatology Award, Japan Rheumatism Association
2003 Mayo-Soley Award, Western Association of Physicians
2003 Elected member, National Academy of Sciences
2004 American Association for Cancer Research-Bruce F. Cain Memorial
Award
2005 Member, Institute of Medicine
2005 Chester Stock Award, Memorial Sloan-Kittering Cancer Center
2005 BIOCOCOM Life Sciences Heritage Award, BIOCOCOM and the Chemical
Heritage Foundation

ABSTRACT

Dennis A. Carson begins the interview with a discussion about growing up in the Atomic Age, moving between the boroughs of New York City. After showing an early interest in chemistry, Carson attended Stuyvesant High School, a well-known school with a science-based curriculum. Upon graduating in 1962, Carson decided to attend Haverford College, a Quaker school outside of Philadelphia, hoping to balance his science background with a degree in the liberal arts. While there, he received a research grant from Smith, Kline, and French to study trichomonas and taught in Haverford's laboratories. He earned a B.A. in history and returned to New York City to attend Columbia University's medical school, where he worked in immunologist Elliott F. Osserman's lab experimenting with tissue cultures. After earning his M.D., Carson completed his internship and residency in California before joining the National Institutes of Health's [NIH] Associate Training Program to defer the Vietnam War draft. While at the NIH, Carson worked under Henry Metzger radiolabeling immunoglobulins and assigning affinity labels. In 1974, Carson left to work in Jay Seegmiller's lab at the University of California, San Diego [UCSD]. There, his research centered around ADA deficiency's effect on the immune system. Carson continued this research as an assistant member of the Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation. He spent his time developing, synthesizing, manufacturing, and running trials for Leustatin, a drug for hairy cell leukemia that was approved in 1993. While at Scripps, Carson co-founded Vical a biotech company that develops DNA vaccines. Over the next decade, he founded other drug-development companies such as Triangle Pharmaceuticals, Dynamax Inc., and Salmedix. When Jay Seegmiller retired from UCSD's Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging in 1990, Carson took his place as director—splitting his time between research and fund-raising. He left in 2003 to head Moores UCSD Cancer Research Center, where he has two drugs in development. Next, Carson describes the numerous awards and appointments he has received, including nomination to the National Academy of Sciences, a rare feat for a doctor. Carson concludes the interview by discussing San Diego's biotech community and his predictions and concerns for its future.

INTERVIEWER

Ted Everson is the manager for biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and environmental programs at the Chemical Heritage Foundation's Center for Contemporary History and Policy. These programs examine the history of the health science industries in the United States and internationally, and use this historical perspective to explore contemporary and emerging innovation, health, globalization, and environmental policy issues. Everson earned a Ph.D. in history and philosophy of science and technology from the University of Toronto and an M.S. in medical genetics from the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *Approaches to Heredity: A Concise History of the Gene* (published 2007) "Genetic Engineering Methods" in *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Technology* (published 2004), and "Genetics and Molecular Biology" in *History of the Exact Sciences and Mathematics* (published 2002).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Childhood and Early Education
Growing up in New York. Early interest in science. Brother and parents. Attending Stuyvesant High School. Working in the New York Public Library's patent office.
- 8 College Education
Studying history at Haverford College. Lab work at the Smith, Kline, and French factory. Medical school at Columbia University. Working with Elliott F. Osserman on methods to create tissue cultures.
- 13 Post-doctorate work
University of California, San Diego [UCSD] for internship and residency. Working at the Salk Institute under Martin G. Weigert, radiolabeling immunoglobulins. Two-year commitment to National Institutes of Health, studying IgE receptors in Henry Metzger's lab. Return to UCSD for post-doc work with Jarvis E. Seegmiller on ADA deficiencies. Fellowships to research rheumatism and leukemia lymphoma.
- 19 Career at Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation
Working with Ernest Beutler while developing 2-CdA. Hairy cell leukemia trials. Thoughts on drug development. Founding Vical with friend Karl Y. Hostetler. Naked DNA research.
- 24 Director of the Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging at UCSD
Background on the company. Lab research and endowment program. Organized research units.
- 27 Director of the Moore Cancer Center
History of the Center. Comprehensive cancer centers. Importance of interdisciplinary research units.
- 29 Biotech companies founded by Carson
Triangle Pharmaceuticals. Dynavax Technologies. Salmedix, Inc. The Orphan Drug Act.
- 32 Accomplishments
Election to the National Academy of Sciences. Receiving the Arthritis Foundation Lee C. Howley, Sr., prize, the American Association Cancer Research Bruce Kane Memorial Award, and the BIOCROM Life Sciences Award. Importance of educational programs.

34	The Biotech Industry San Diego biotech community. Government regulation and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. Influencing policy.
37	Notes
38	Index

NOTES

1. Paul de Kruif, *Microbe Hunters* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1926).
2. The Women's Medical College as founded in 1867 in Philadelphia to teach female medical students. In 1970 it was renamed the Medical College of Pennsylvania, and began admitting male students. The Medical College of Pennsylvania still exists today, as a component of Drexel University's College of Medicine.
3. As an M.D., Carson had the option of signing up for a commitment in public health service rather than signing up for the draft.
4. Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) refers to the formal set of rules, administered in the US by the Food and Drug Organization, for regulating drug manufacturing.
5. Vical was founded in 1987.
6. Vical's initial public offering (IPO) was held in 2003.
7. Dynavax was founded in 1996 by Carson, Eyal Raz, and Lawrence M. Lichtenstein. The company held its IPO in early 2004.
8. The 2002 Sarbanes Oxley Act was passed in the wake of the corporate financial scandals of Enron, WorldCom, and others, initiating far-reaching changes in business financial activity and auditing requirements.

INDEX

2-chlorodeoxyadenosine [2-CdA], 19-23, 28

A

Adenosine deaminase [ADA] deficiency, 15
 Seegmiller, Jarvis E., 15-16, 18-19, 24, 33
Affinity labels, 14
Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the, 13
American Association for Cancer Research [AACR], 33
 Bruce Kane Memorial Award, 33
Anderson, Chris, 15
Arthritis Foundation, the, 19, 33
 Lee C. Howley Sr. prize, 33

B

Barry, David W., 29
Bayh-Dole Act, 21
Beutler, Ernest, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 33
BIOCOM, 33-36
 Life Sciences Award, 33
Biotech industry, 16, 21-25, 29, 33-35
 competition with other countries, 35
 government regulations, 21, 35
 in San Diego, 34-35
 patents, 21
Braunwald, Eugene, 14
Bronx High School of Science, 6
Burroughs-Wellcome, 29
 Barry, David W., 29

C

California Institute of Technology [Caltech], 26
California, San Diego, University of [UCSD], 10, 14-15, 25, 26-29, 36
 Braunwald, Eugene, 14
 Hostetler, Karl Y., 23, 29
 Moore's UCSD Cancer Research Center, 10, 26-27, 34, 36
 Seegmiller, Jarvis E., 15-16, 18-19, 24, 33
Carson, Dennis A.
 brother, 4, 8
 brother [Jeffrey Carson], 3
 children, 5, 10, 36
 early interest in science, 2, 4
 elementary school [PS-186], 1, 4
 family history, 1, 2, 4

- father, 2, 4
- high school [Stuyvesant High School], 1, 3, 5-9
- interest in interdisciplinary studies, 9-10, 26, 28, 36
- Judaism, 2, 9
- music, 4-5
- son, 10
- wife, 36
- Cephalon, Inc., 32
- Chemical Heritage Foundation [CHF], 33-34
- Ciba-Geigy, 25
- Columbia University, 11-12
 - Marks, Paul A., 13
 - Osserman, Elliott F., 12-14, 16

D

- Dynavax Technologies, 30-32
 - allergy immunotherapy, 31
 - Raz, Eyal, 31, 33

E

- Eagle, Harry, 13
 - Eagle's medium, 13
- Emory University, 29
 - Schinazi, Raymond F., 29

F

- Federal Drug Association [FDA], 20, 22, 31
- Forward Ventures, Inc., 30

G

- Glaxo, Inc., 29
- Great Depression, the, 2, 6-7
 - effect on Stuyvesant High School, 7

H

- Haverford College, 8
- Haverford, Pennsylvania, 8
- Hostetler, Karl Y., 23, 29
- Hybritech, Inc., 34

I

- Idec Pharmaceuticals, Inc., 34
- Immunoglobulins, 12, 14
- Importance of interdisciplinary research, 9-10, 26, 28, 36

J

Johnson and Johnson [J&J], 22

K

Kabakoff, David S., 32

L

Lactobacillus, 18-19

Leoni, Lorenzo M., 32

Leslie, Mark, 1

Veritas Software Corporation, 1

Leukemia, 13, 16, 19, 21-22, 31-32

hairy cell leukemia, 21

Leukemia Society of America, the, 19

Los Angeles, California, 11

Lymphocytes, 18-19, 21

M

Madison Lake, Washington, 20

Manhattan, New York, 1, 3, 5, 11-12, 14

March of Dimes, the, 14

Marks, Paul A., 13

MD Anderson Cancer Center, 22, 27

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, 13

Mendelson, John, 27

developer of Erbitux, 27

Menlo Park, California, 35

Metzger, Henry, 14-16, 31, 33

adenosine deaminase [ADA], 15-19

Adenosine triphosphate [ATP], 16-17

Chemical Immunology Division, National Institutes of Health [NIH], 14

Immunoglobulin E [IgE], 16

Immunoglobulin G [IgG], 16

research with Dennis Carson, 18

Microbe Hunters, 2, 4

Moores UCSD Cancer Research Center, 10, 26-27, 34, 36

founder Mendelson, John, 27

Myelomas, 13

N

Naked DNA, 23-24, 30

National Academy of Sciences, the, 32-33

2003 election, 32, 33

rarity of MDs being elected, 32

National Cancer Institute, the, 18, 20, 23, 27

National Institutes of Health [NIH], the, 6, 14-16, 20, 23, 25
Anderson, Chris, 15
Metzger, Henry, 14-16, 31, 33
Nirenberg, Marshall W., 15
New York Public Library, 7-8
patent office, 7
Nirenberg, Marshall W., 15
Novartis Pharmaceuticals, Corporation, 25

O

Organized research units, 26-28, 33-34
Orphan Drug Act, the, 32
Ortho Biotech Products, LD, 22
Osserman, Elliott F.
discoverer of multiple myeloma, 12
tissue culture research, 13

P

Paros, Greece, 3
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 8-10, 14
Pomona College, 11

Q

Queens, New York, 1

R

Raz, Eyal, 31, 33
Royston, Ivor, 21
Forward Ventures, Inc., 30
Hybritech, Inc., 34
Idex Pharmaceuticals, Inc., 34

S

Salk Institute for Biological Studies, 14, 34, 36
Weigert, Martin G., 14, 33
Salmedix, Inc., 31, 32
Kabakoff, David S., 32
Leoni, Lorenzo M., 32
Sam and Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging, 10, 24-28
patent payment by Ciba-Geigy, 25
Seegmiller, Jarvis E., 15-16, 18-19, 24, 33
Stein, Sam S., 25
San Diego biotech industry, 34-35
effect of immigration on local industry, 34
effect of increased regulation, 35
how government could assist, 35

San Diego, California, 1, 10, 14-15, 21, 25, 33-35
Sarbanes-Oxley Act, the, 35
Schinazi, Raymond F., 29
 Emory University, 29
Scripps Research Institute, the, 6, 18-22, 24-25, 28, 34
 Beutler, Ernest, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 33
Seegmiller, Jarvis E., 15-16, 18-19, 24, 33
 adenosine deaminase deficiency, 15-16, 19
 discoverer of Lesch-Nyhan Syndrome, 15
Smith, Kline and French Laboratories, 9, 11
Stein, Sam S., 25
Stuyvesant High School, 5-7, 9
 effect of the Great Depression on Stuyvesant faculty, 7
 high success rate of Stuyvesant students, 6
 influential teachers at Stuyvesant, 6

T

Triangle Pharmaceuticals, Inc., 29
 AZT research, 29-30
 Barry, David W., 29
 Forward Ventures, Inc., 30
 Schinazi, Raymond F., 29
Trichomonas, 9-10

V

Veritas Software Corporation, 1
 Leslie, Mark, 1
Vical, Inc., 23-24, 30-31
 Hostetler, Karl Y., 23, 29
 naked DNA vaccine, 24
Vietnam War, the, 8, 14-15
 effect on science through NIH fellows program, 15

W

Weigert, Martin G., 14, 33
Women's Medical College, 9