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Richmond W. Smith Jr.

Raymond C. Mellinger, MD*

Richmond W. Smith Jr., MD, fourth chairman of the Department of Medicine of Henry Ford Hospital, retired from that position in October 1979. He and Margaret, his charming wife, have moved to the granite house they have been building for several years at Tenant’s Harbor on the rugged coast of Maine, forty miles south of Camden.

Richmond Smith was born in Walpole, Massachusetts, a member of a large New England family, and as a boy he sailed along the Atlantic Coast past the site of his present home. After a public school education, he studied physics and biology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and graduated in 1938. The physical sciences failed to meet the humanistic needs of his intellectual drives, however, and he applied to the Yale University College of Medicine. There, during his pre-admission interview, he revealed his intention to become an endocrinologist.

As a medical student working at the New Haven Infirmary, Richmond Smith met Frank Sladen Jr., a patient whose father was the first physician at Henry Ford Hospital and was then Chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine. Dr. Sladen successfully recruited Dr. Smith for internship at Ford, initiating a long, fruitful relationship. During that first year in Detroit (1942), Richmond met and married Margaret Trimble who was teaching at Detroit’s famed Merrill-Palmer School. They have two lovely daughters and two grandchildren.

Called to war from his internship, Dr. Smith served three years as a naval medical officer and survived the longest cruise ever made by a U.S. Navy destroyer—20 months at sea. After combat duty, he trained in internal medicine at the New York Hospital and later was appointed Research Fellow in Endocrinology in 1948 under the direction of Dr. Ephraim Shorr. When he completed his training, he turned again to the Midwest, accepting a position in the Division of Metabolic Diseases at Henry Ford Hospital in 1949. Subsequently, in 1953, he founded the Division of Endocrinology, followed in a short time by the Endocrinology Laboratory.

Dr. Smith contributed importantly to those exhilarating days of endocrinology. His first major study, which appeared in 1951 in the New England Journal of Medicine, established the clinical effectiveness of ACTH and the corticosteroids in inflammatory diseases of the eye. In 1954 he was co-chairman (with Oliver H. Gaebler and C.N.H. Long) of the International Symposium on Growth Hormone at Henry Ford Hospital. In 1957 he first began publishing observations on the roles of environmental, nutritional, and endocrine factors in metabolic bone disease. Two of his important papers in this area are reprinted in this issue (see pp. 168-81), and a perceptive evaluation of his work as a clinical investigator is found in the writing of A. Michael Parfitt on pp. 95-107. In the mid-sixties, Dr. Smith devised a method for measuring the viscoelastic properties of normal and osteoporotic bone spicules, utilizing principles learned during his early physics training at MIT.

At about this time, the critical need for strong leadership in medicine prompted the Henry Ford Hospital trustees to turn to Dr. Smith to become Chairman of the Department of Medicine. He accepted, but in responding so fully to the leadership demands of the department (and subsequently of the hospital when he became Chairman of the Council of Department Chairmen in 1976) the investigations, and then the special practice of endocrinology, were necessarily foreclosed.

With Dr. Smith’s leadership, the Department and the Hospital experienced impressive growth. The number of staff in internal medicine nearly doubled, new specialty groups, notably Nephrology, Genetics, and Immunology were developed, affiliation with the University of Michigan was established and nurtured, the vitally important Ford Foun-
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dation grant was secured in 1973, and its provisions were fulfilled.

Certainly Dr. Smith was a major architect of one of Henry Ford Hospital's most important professional developments of the past decade. He had long been concerned about the separation of research scientists from those who delivered care to patients. To reduce this separation, he conceived the program of Clinical Investigators, scientists with staff appointments in clinical departments who are provided laboratory facilities and research support in the Benson Ford Research and Education Center. Appropriately, the Bone and Mineral Research Laboratory and the Richmond W. Smith Research Laboratory in Endocrinology and Metabolism are staffed and supported under this program.

But with the end of the decade, thirty years after he first joined our staff, Rich felt that "now it's time to move on." Back in New England, his restless energy is taking new directions. He is working hard, clearing land, sawing logs, and his intellectual drive is increasingly directed toward ecological problems and the need to preserve and protect our environment. There is a lot of environment on the coast of Maine.

To acknowledge the very real appreciation of the Henry Ford Hospital staff for Dr. Smith's great contributions, this "festschrift" issue of the Journal is published in his honor. Because the authors of these papers have had the privilege of training or collaborating with Richmond Smith, the emphasis is clearly endocrinology, especially thyroid and adrenal disorders. Moreover, the papers of Kleerekoper, Rao, Matkovic, and Casco testify that his abiding interest in calcium studies continues. Finally, Dr. José Goldman's contribution on insulin-resistant diabetes represents the current work of the Endocrinology Laboratory named in honor of Richmond Smith.