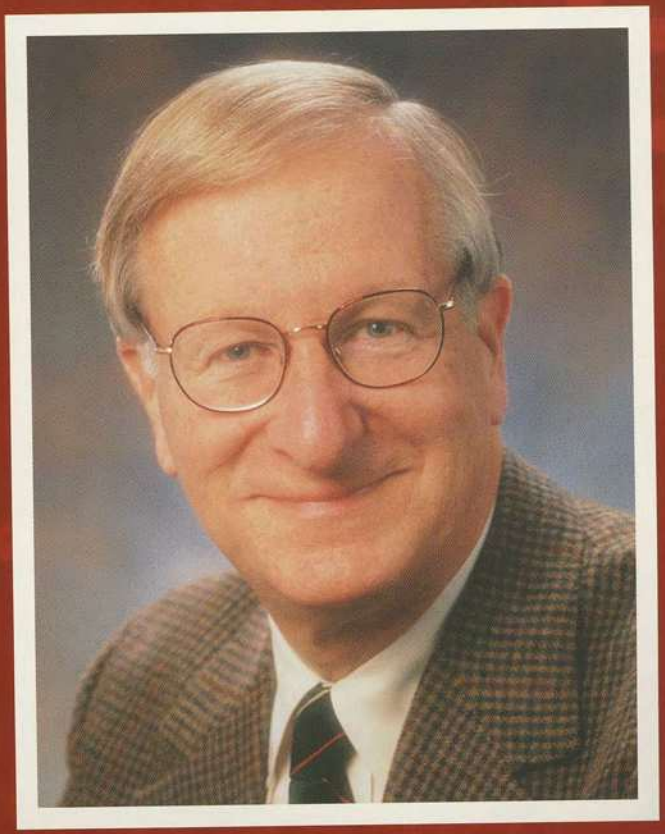
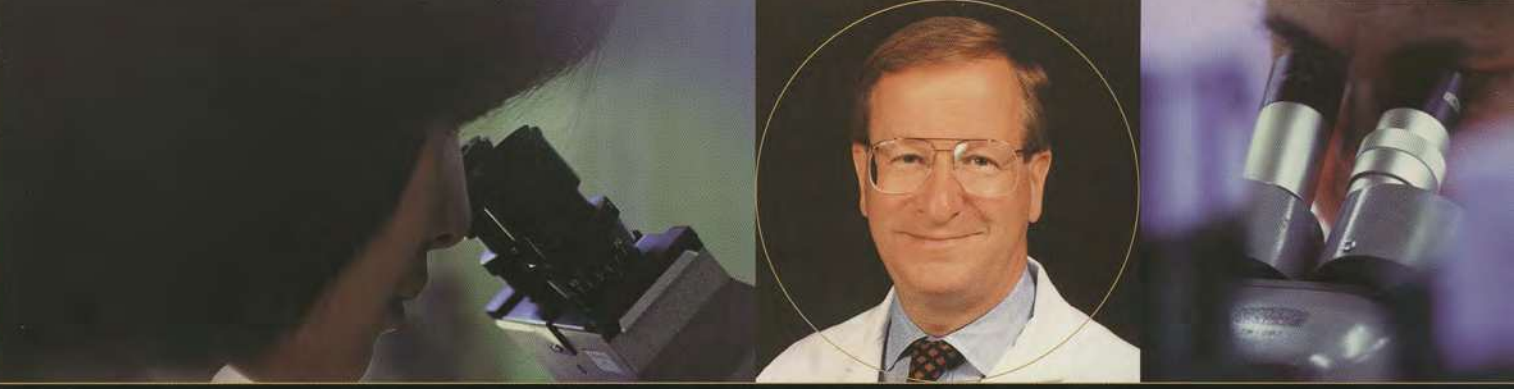
R. Gordon Douglas, Jr., MD



RECIPIENT OF THE MAXWELL FINLAND AWARD FOR

SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT *2000*



Medical researcher, clinical investigator, academic administrator, and industrial leader—not a combination readily found in a single individual, but the career of this year's winner of the Maxwell Finland Award for Scientific Achievement, R. Gordon Douglas, Jr., MD, encompasses them all.

"I spent the 1960's doing virology, the 1970's doing infectious diseases and clinical studies, the 1980's being a chairman of medicine, and the 1990's running a vaccine company," Dr. Douglas says. What he does not say but what the record shows is that he has been remarkably successful in all.

Dr. Douglas graduated from Princeton University in 1955 and entered Cornell University Medical School. It was the period when the polio vaccine had been developed and was beginning to be widely used. "It was a very exciting time and I was stimulated by this. It got me interested in virology and I became fascinated with viruses and how they worked. So, after medical school and my residency in internal medicine I came to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases as a clinical investigator."

In 1966 Dr. Douglas went to Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas and, in 1970, to the University of Rochester School of Medicine in Rochester, NY, where he became Professor of Medicine and Microbiology. While he was at Rochester he headed the infectious disease unit and became especially interested in respiratory viruses and antiviral therapies. "He pioneered the antiviral therapy for influenza and demonstrated the occurrence and pathogenesis of nosocomial respiratory syncytial virus infection and its methods of transmission," says Richard Krause, MD, former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

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"His research on the mechanisms of transmission, immunology, and antiviral therapy of influenza, rhinovirus, and respiratory syncytial virus infections led to the current recommendations for their control in hospitals, as well as for the use of the antiviral agents amantadine and rimantadine for treating influenza. The fact is he is a very good, distinguished, and competent clinician in infectious diseases," says Maurice Hilleman, Ph.D., the director of the Merck Institute for Therapeutic Research, a pioneer in vaccine development in his own right, and NFID's Maxwell Finland Award honoree in 1998.

In 1982 Dr. Douglas became Chairman of the Department of Medicine at Cornell University Medical College where he had been chief resident two decades before. Here, he was of course an administrator rather than a laboratory or clinical scientist. For many, reaching department chairmanship at a major medical teaching institution such as Cornell might well be thought the pinnacle of one's career. But for Gordon Douglas, the position had proved to be only the stepping stone to a totally new career—a successful pharmaceutical company executive.

One of Dr. Douglas's predecessors at Cornell was Alexander Bearn, MD, who calls Dr. Douglas "an extraordinarily broadly-based physician." Dr. Bearn left Cornell for the pharmaceutical concern of Merck and Company. "Dr. Douglas had become interested in the role of the pharmaceutical industry in the health care of this country. Since I was retiring I chatted with Gordon about the job at Merck and interested him in the position," says Dr. Bearn, who is now executive officer of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

Dr. Douglas went to Merck in 1990. "At Merck he did an extremely good job. Although he started with a relatively small area of responsibility, this expanded as it became clear that he was not only a very fine infectious disease doctor, but also that he had talents in terms of negotiation and business acumen," says Dr. Bearn.

The year after he came to Merck Dr. Douglas became head of its vaccine division. "The vaccine division was not doing well," Dr. Hilleman notes. "At the time there were questions whether Merck should get out of the vaccine business entirely. He rebuilt the division's sales and marketing forces and brought products to the world. The result was to drive the vaccine business at Merck to over a billion dollars in sales last year. That's a tremendous accomplishment."

Dr. Douglas has also played a major role in developing public health policy. As a member of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee and the World Health Organization's Children's Vaccine Initiative Consultative Group, he was a forceful proponent for preventative medicine by vaccines. "He has been an articulate and effective spokesman for more focused national and world planning for vaccine research and development and for the delivery of vaccines to all populations," Dr. Hilleman says.

Dr. Douglas retired from Merck in May of last year but he still keeps up his interest in infectious disease prevention. He is a consultant in Strategic Planning for Vaccine Research and Development at the National Institutes of Health Vaccine Research Center. "The Center's activities are of course primarily focused on AIDS vaccine development," Dr. Douglas notes. "But once these technologies have been established they will provide a platform for the development of other needed vaccines such as those to combat TB and malaria."

He also continues his advocacy of infectious disease prevention as a member of a group called the Princeton Project 55. "This is a group of 1955 graduates who have decided that, after successful careers, they would like to give something back in terms of public service. The idea is to mount projects that will lead to systematic change, not just minor changes," Dr. Douglas says.

The particular project with which Dr. Douglas is involved is tuberculosis prevention. "TB is one of the world's most neglected diseases. Until recently when it was overtaken by AIDS, it was the world's number one infectious disease, with the highest death rate. There are 2.5 million deaths per year from TB, and no one is paying any attention to it in terms of either control or research and development," Dr. Douglas says. "Our view is that while control measures can be helpful, the long-range solution lies in the development of a vaccine. So, we are focusing on advocacy for the development of a TB vaccine, talking to Congress and to organizations both in and out of government."

When Dr. Douglas ran a vaccine testing center funded by NIAID at the University of Rochester, Dr. Krause, NIAID Director at the time, recalls that "Gordon Douglas always gave us everything the contract called for—and then a little bit more."

Another comment on Dr. Douglas in his Rochester years comes from Paul Parkman, MD, then a virologist in the NIAID's Division of Biologics Standards, the agency responsible for licensing vaccines. "I have a clear image of him. He seemed really smart. You know there are a lot of smart guys in medical research, but one of the things that stood out was that he was always pleasant, he knew his data well and he presented the findings in a level and reasonable way. He didn't oversell them nor did he play them down. I think this was one of the characteristics that carried him so far."

Dr. Bearn adds: "If there is one word that sums up Gordon Douglas it is integrity".