

Acceptance of the 2013 Association of American Physicians George M. Kober Medal Acceptance remarks

John T. Potts Jr.

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Supplement

Larry Jameson suggested I might make some personal reflections as well as expressing my thanks to those who made this delightful occasion possible. Members of the AAP are traditionally physicians, but physicians in an academic medical center where there are multiple missions in which they are involved, including, of course patient care, but also teaching and biomedical research across the full spectrum from basic work to translational medicine applications and the newer fields of health services and policy. These environments by the nature of these multiple roles emphasize the interdependence of the physicians and the increasingly large number of Ph.D. scientists and the numerous younger trainees. I have enjoyed my many years at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School (HMS), which span a total of 56 years from when I first came as an intern. Actually I have had only 48 years of continuous service at the MGH (having had the good fortune to spend eight years at the NIH — in the marvelous environment spoken of so fondly by Joel Goldstein and Mike Brown where my career in biomedical research began in earnest). Larry Jameson has outlined my research interests on parathyroid hormone, beginning with a focus on the homeostatic role of PTH in regulation of blood calcium to the current complexity of its role in bone [...]

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**Figure 15**

Chiefs of Medicine at the MGH bicentennial. Left: John Potts (1981–1996). Middle: Alexander Leaf (1965–1981). Right: Dennis Ausiello (1996–2013).

Legacy of leadership

The hallways of the MGH are graced by portraits of its Chiefs of Medicine — surprisingly few in number, reflecting long terms of leadership. Over the last century, these chiefs have included James Howard Means, Walter Bauer, Alex Leaf, John Potts, and Dennis Ausiello. The latter three are captured in this photograph from the MGH bicentennial celebration, held in 2011 (Figure 15). Finally, John's portrait captures his intense gaze and glow when he engages you in conversation (Figure 16).

**Figure 16**

The unveiling of John's portrait (middle) captures the "gaze and glow" he bestows on those around him. Left: John Potts. Right: Dennis Ausiello.

John, for those of us fortunate to work with you or to be trained by you, we are deeply grateful for your mentorship. On behalf of patients, physicians, and scientists, we are grateful for your contributions to the field of calcium metabolism. Congratulations on receiving the Kober Medal. I now present to you Dr. John T. Potts Jr.

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This article is adapted from a presentation at the ASCI/AAP Joint Meeting, April 28, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

Members of the AAP are traditionally physicians, but physicians in an academic medical center where there are multiple missions in which they are involved, including, of course patient care, but also teaching and biomedical research across the full spectrum from basic work to translational medicine applications and the newer fields of health services and policy. These environments by the nature of these multiple roles emphasize the interdependence of the

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Larry Jameson has outlined my research interests on parathyroid hormone, beginning with a focus on the homeostatic role of PTH in regulation of blood calcium to the current complexity of its role in bone biology and particularly the disease osteoporosis. During my pleasant years of work, the field has exploded. A new society devoted to bone biology and disease formed in the '70s that is now 5,000 strong, an unimagined development when I began. I've had the pleasure of working with many fine colleagues, many of whom were cited by Dr. Jameson.

I'm pleased that so many friends and family members are here. At the obvious risk of embarrassing her, I want to give special thanks to my wife of 52 years, Susanne. Her calm and steady support despite my hectic work schedule, par-

ticularly during the early years with our three young children, is remarkable as I look back. The prevailing attitude then was that women at home took care of the house and children, while the men were free to work; fortunately, now that attitude has changed. Her tolerance was undoubtedly influenced by the lifestyle in the family when she was growing up, a time when her father, an internationally renowned scholar of medieval and early church history, was so protected.

The theme of personal reflection I wanted to spend a few minutes on is the importance of what is termed mentoring. Mentoring is not a perfect phrase by any means. What I'm speaking about is helping others in our field whom we meet and interact with. It has always impressed me that the mentor doesn't do all that much. What is critical is to listen and carefully deduce what the colleague with whom you're speaking wants, not what you may prefer them to do. Once you understand

that, then your role is to knock on a few metaphorical doors and/or point to some possible pathways for support or opportunities that they may not have been aware of; it is critical to follow up and keep in touch.

It is overwhelmingly clear to me that 99-plus percent of the effort involved in the development of a successful career comes from the individual, not the mentor. On the other hand, the feedback that I have often received directly or through letters related to awards speaks poignantly of the effect of mentors on those advised. If it is so important to them, perhaps we underestimate what our role can mean, particularly in this time of unusual stress in academic medical centers due to tightened resources. Such support from us can be critical to encourage our younger colleagues to stay in the field of academic medical science, helping thereby to preserve the remarkable dynamic revolution in biology that has ushered in so much progress.