On the Beat

Appreciation

Ancel Keys, Ph.D., the physiologist who became a leading authority on the role of diet in health, died on November 20 at the age of 100. His influence stretched from the skies of World War II, owing to his role in developing "K-rations" for U.S. paratroopers, to the cover of Time magazine, for his role in the discovery and popularization of the link between cholesterol and heart disease.

Dr. Keys attended the University of California, Berkeley, where he received a B.A. in economics, an M.S. in biology, and a Ph.D. in oceanography and biology. He received a second Ph.D., in physiology, from King's College, Cambridge in 1938.

Dr. Keys became a professor at the University of Minnesota in 1936, and organized what would become the Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene. He remained its director until his retirement in 1972.

Nicknamed "Mr. Cholesterol," Dr. Keys was most noted for his "Seven Countries Study," in which he postulated that the disparity in heart attack rates between nations was due to the influence of fat in the diets.

Finns, with the highest national heart attack, ate large quantities of animal fat and had high cholesterol levels. Cretans, with the lowest heart attack rate, ate far less fat, with olive oil the primary source, and had lower cholesterol levels. This was the first linkage between diet and coronary disease.

Such data led Dr. Keys to the development and popularization of the "Mediterranean Diet" in a series of best-selling books cowritten with his wife, Margaret Harvey, a biochemist.

Changes

Gary S. Roubin, M.D., was chosen head of the Department of Interventional Cardiology at Lenox Hill Hospital, New York. Dr. Roubin, the coinventor of the Gianturo-Roubin Flex-Stent, the first Food and Drug Administration–approved coronary artery stent, is slated to expand the new department in depth and breadth of service. This includes hiring Howard Cohen, M.D., formerly of the University of Pittsburgh, to serve as director of the heart failure and structural heart program, and Kirk Garratt, M.D., from the Mayo Clinic, who will serve as director of interventional cardiology research. Dr. Roubin returns to Lenox Hill Hospital where he was director of endovascular therapy in 1997-2003. Roubin's new team follows the departure of nine interventional cardiologists, including Jeffery Moses, M.D., former chief of interventional cardiology, who all left Lenox Hill for Columbia University in August 2004.

The Cardiovascular Research Foundation will collaborate with Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC), New York, to translate basic science into new therapies and less invasive procedures for patients with cardiovascular disease. CUMC has also created a new Center for Interventional Vascular Therapy to foster collaboration across medical subspecialties.

The Heart Rhythm Society has relocated its headquarters to Washington from Natick, Mass. "Being in Washington will help us forge stronger alliances with governing agencies and health care groups whose work complements ours," said Stephen C. Hammill, M.D., president of the society.

Rx Briefs

The FDA issued a Class 1 recall on automated external defibrillators (AEDs) produced by the now-defunct Access CardioSystems Inc., warning customers to stop using them immediately. These devices are used by hospitals, fire departments, and emergency personnel. The AEDs were recalled because they may fail to deliver a shock due to a faulty circuit board and/or may turn on unexpectedly due to a faulty switch and fail to operate.

The ASCOT trial of Pfizer's amlodipine (Norvasc) and perindopril (Coversyl) ended early because the drugs performed so well it would have been unethical to continue, said Peter Sever, Ph.D., of Imperial College, London, cochair of the 19,000-patient study. Patients on amlodipine (calcium channel blocker) and perindopril (ACE inhibitor) had substantially fewer cardiovascular events, including heart attacks, than did those on β-blockers and diuretics.

—Mark S. Lesney

Index of Advertisers