

## WORKING WITH DR. D.

José was working as a post-doctoral research associate at Penn's Biochemistry Department for Dr. Sam G. when, one day, Sam brought into the laboratory a short, very young physician by the name of Dr. Bob D. Sam told José that Bob wanted to get his Ph.D. in Biochemistry. Bob had been sent from Medicine, where they thought he was a superb student, since it had taken him only four to five years in an accelerated program during the war years to get both his pre-med and medical degrees.

José assigned an interesting research project on steroids to Bob. Unfortunately, there was some synthetic work necessary to obtain some of the compounds needed for the study. Bob proved to be completely disinterested in the synthesis of compounds and, whenever José worked together with him in the laboratory on this part of the project, Bob invariably found excuses for leaving. After several of these disappearances, José found himself left with the task of doing the syntheses alone. This he reported to Dr. G., explaining that he didn't feel Bob was interested enough to put in the time necessary in either doing chemistry or in taking some courses that José had suggested as required for a Ph.D. After about five or six weeks, Bob disappeared completely.

Around this time (in 1953), construction of a Veterans Administration Hospital was in progress about a block away from the University. This construction continued despite vehement protests from numerous medical groups in the Philadelphia area. Pressure from these groups became so intense that President Eisenhower ordered a reduction in the size of the hospital under construction. After many compromises with veterans' groups, a 500-bed hospital was agreed upon. Central Office in Washington (VACO) began to consider the staffing of this soon-to-be completed facility. An incredibly vicious battle began between the five leading medical schools of the city. Most of them were extremely unhappy that the senator from Pennsylvania had maneuvered the space for the construction to be located near to the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, and that he had also arranged for the removal of cemetery plots in an area bordering 39<sup>th</sup> Street and Woodland Avenue in order to make room for the new building. A *modus vivendi* was agreed upon. A rotating series of consultants would advise and direct the day-to-day operation of the Veterans Administration Hospital. The arrangement was very complex. A committee of five deans was formed, and this committee, representing the five medical schools, would advise the director of the VA Hospital on its daily operation. Consensus was sometimes hard to come by, and many important practical activities were continuously delayed and never agreed on. Each department in the VA Hospital would receive a complete change of policy on the handling and treatment of patients, depending on which team of

consultants would be involved.

Very early in the operation, it became evident that only four teams of consultants would remain active. One of the medical schools (Women's Medical) felt, at that time, that it could not handle a complete load, and made arrangements with the University of Pennsylvania Medical School to jointly handle some of its consulting, attending, and advisory sessions. The pay per consultant, regardless of the length of the visit, was \$75, while attendants received only \$50. In 1953, the addition of this money to some for individual physicians (and/or the departments for whom they worked) represented significant additional remuneration. In 1954, a three-month tour of duty was established for each of the four major medical schools.

Meanwhile, José was finishing a rather large and important research project for Dr. G. This project involved studying pathways involved in the conversion of male hormone to female hormone, both in the ovary and the testicle, in various species of animals.<sup>1</sup> It was at this time that the Head of Radioisotope Units at VACO in Washington, D.C., paid a visit to the laboratory of Dr. G. Not expecting to find the involvement of five medical schools in the operation of the Philadelphia VA Hospital, he had come to suggest that Dr. G. become the Head of Research there. During this visit, he also interviewed José who, he concluded, would prove a good principal scientist for the hospital's Radioisotope Department.

Then, in the summer of 1953, Bob was offered (by Dr. Lyon, Associate Chief of Medicine for Research and Education in Washington) the position of Head of the Radioisotope Unit for the VA hospital. Bob accepted and was appointed as Chief. Shortly thereafter, he requested that José come over to handle the laboratory facilities for the Radioisotope Unit and the future Unit of Medical Research that would begin operations when Dr. G. arrived. But after José arrived, it became obvious that the dispute of controlling the VA Hospital in Philadelphia could not be resolved by bringing in Dr. G. from the University of Pennsylvania to run the research. Jefferson Medical School felt cheated that the Head of the Radioisotope Unit was not a Jefferson person. It was then that the arrangement of rotating consultants for the VA Radioisotope Unit was established. Every three months, a different team of consultants took over. Dr. B. and his group consulted on behalf of Hahnemann Medical School, while Dr. C. and Dr. R., with their group, consulted from Penn. Dr. R. and his department consulted from Temple University. Dr. E. consulted for Jefferson. Women's Medical College, later to be renamed Medical College of Pennsylvania (M.C.P) did not have a Radioisotope Department and, therefore, did not participate in this rotation.

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<sup>1</sup> José later published several articles on this research, among them, one in *Archives of Biochemistry and Biophysics* [64, 285-290 (1956)].

Every three months the questionnaires for patients were revised to suit the consulting group that was newly in charge. Dr. R., when his turn came, refused to have Geiger counters of a certain brand used, so new Geiger counters of a different brand would replace those that had been in operation when the consultants from Temple came in. Then, at the end of Temple's three-month term, the old Geiger counters preferred by the Penn group were reinstated. The dosages for uptakes administered to the patients were also changed every three months to suit the medical-school team currently in charge. Treatment doses were also varied to suit each consulting team. Patients receiving an uptake could receive anywhere from between 20 to 50 microcuries of iodine for a simple study, depending on which school might be running operations that month. The maintenance of files was very difficult, as treatment doses would suddenly be changed if the patient happened to fall between two different three-month periods of medical-school control. Treatment in the hospital's medical and surgical wards was also extremely difficult to regulate. The Chief of Pharmacy once confided to José that he would change refrigerators every three months in order to satisfy each school, meanwhile hiding the previous refrigerators that contained medicines disliked by those presently in charge. The length of stay for a particular ailment depended upon what consulting team was in control at the time.

This situation lasted for four to five years. One extreme case involved a situation where, in the middle of an assay on a patient, the consultant noticed that a voltage stabilizer used in a machine came from a company that, he claimed, was both unreliable and undesirable. Ordering the test to be stopped, he demanded that the equipment be changed for a repeat of that same test to be performed later. By the time that the new equipment arrived, that particular consultant had been rotated out, and his replacement ordered the test done with the original stabilizer.

A special meeting was finally held about the hospital, and the city of Philadelphia was divided into areas of influence for each of the medical schools. Jefferson, anxious to obtain space that it needed to expand in downtown Philadelphia, agreed to remove its staff of consultants from the VA Hospital if Penn would, in return, support its acquisition of the two-square city blocks that Jefferson needed. Temple was given jurisdiction of areas in North Philadelphia for ambulance receipt, while Hahnemann received other benefits. Women's Medical College requested to handle only those things that they were able, and to do this under Penn's supervision. This distribution required the approval of the senators and the governor of the state of Pennsylvania. Once this approval was obtained, the VACO wrote out a contract emphasizing exclusivity with the University of Pennsylvania. In this contract, they included a clause stating that Women's Medical College would have a sub-contract from Penn and be permitted to maintain its consultants on the VA payroll, for the fiscal responsibility was too large for

Women's Medical to lose. The new arrangement began to function, and certain departments came totally under the control of either Penn or M.C.P. It was decided to have two Chiefs of Medicine at this time (Dr. M. for M.C.P., and Dr. S. for Penn), while Surgery remained as a rotating system.

One day a dispute arose. One of the Chiefs of Medicine (Dr. St.) felt that Dr. M. had a larger office than he did. This ran against the concept of the primary and secondary contractor. A careful measurement was taken of the two offices, and Dr. S. turned out to be correct. Dr. M. was ordered to vacate his office and switch over to Dr. S.'s quarters. After this, the dominancy of consultants was well established, yet Women's Medical College still received a number of positions. By this time, the staff at the VA Hospital was permitted to hold faculty appointments at either of the two medical schools. (It was then that José received his appointment as Assistant Professor at Penn.)

Back in 1953, Bob was having many problems with the Chief of Medicine. Many a time, Bob would come running to the laboratory and open various reagent bottles; then he would pour part of the contents of these into the sink. (This was to show that certain tests had already been performed.)

Bob hired people to come work for him without much concern as to their abilities or suitability. One young woman was hired for a good position into the Unit without José's ever having interviewed her. After a few days, José found out that she was a medical school student in need of a job between semesters. She had failed to mention this to anybody, and Bob had never looked into the matter after interviewing her and after spending many hours trying to get Civil Service status for her. As soon as the new semester at her medical school reconvened, the young woman disappeared. From the VA Hospital. Thus, numerous hours of Civil Service paperwork were wasted, since her six-week stay was insufficient for training her or for using her productively.

Several other such cases were similarly hired by Bob. One was a young Korean who could never be found in the laboratory or anywhere in the hospital, for that matter. When questioned, he would claim that he had been attending seminars and conferences at other hospitals in the city. After four or five weeks, he, too, disappeared completely. Meanwhile, considerable additional work had to be done to close his files. About twenty years later, a government investigator would come to see José, now Head of the laboratory. He told José that this Korean had given him José's name as a reference for some important job that the government investigator would not specify. Since José had never seen the Korean work, he refused to make any statement, positive or negative, concerning the fellow. The government agent remained with José for three or four hours, trying to get him to say something definite, which was impossible for José to do. Why should somebody who had worked only four to five weeks in a laboratory twenty years

earlier (and who, in that period, had been absent from the job most of the time) use José's name? This mystery was never solved.

One day, a patient arrived at the Radioisotope Unit. He needed radioactive gold as a palliative to ease the pain in the pleura of his lungs. This patient was terminal. At that time, gentle radiation of the pleura was the method used to ease such pain. For this purpose, Bob began the procedure by making a small hole in the side of the man's body, and inserting a plastic tube, which was then connected to a dripping radioactive gold set-up. The patient was gently rotated by José so that the gold would distribute itself thoroughly. In the middle of this procedure, Bob said, "I'll be right back!" and left the room. Two hours later, José managed to get help from the surgical department to suture the patient and move him back to the ward. Bob returned two days later! He had suddenly, he told José, decided to take a trip and, upon his return, he was most indignant that the hospital refused to pay a bill of over \$200 for garage storage of his car had occurred during the interim. Bob continued to curse the Fiscal Department for days, and little work was accomplished in the laboratory.

The FASEB<sup>2</sup> meetings were being held one year in Atlantic City, and Bob invited José to come with him to attend. Much to José's astonishment, when he arrived at their hotel, José found Bob's wife Carla already installed in the room that he and Bob were to share. José ended up sleeping on a cot immediately beside their double bed for the duration of the meeting.

One day, a few weeks later, while Bob was out of town, José was in the laboratory performing minor surgery on a rat. The surgery involved the injection of some radioactive material into the animal, and José was in the middle of this part of the procedure when the secretary (Vernelle) came in, announcing that there was an emergency telephone call for him. Interrupting his work, José hurried to the phone. It was Carla yelling hysterically. "Bob is out of town. You must come immediately! I have a serious problem!" She told José that she would be waiting for him and where he should pick her up. Dashing out of the hospital and taking his car, José drove to the street corner where he had been asked to appear. Standing there holding a large double-handled bag was Carla. She got into his car and directed him to a neighborhood in the suburbs about twenty minutes away. "Stop and park here!" she told him as they approached a spot just past the intersection of Lansdowne and Baltimore Avenue. Taking José with her, Carla entered what turned out to be a cooperative supermarket. Pointing to various canned goods and other food items, she requested him to load them into a shopping cart for her. When the cart was full, José helped her carry the now-full shopping bag that she had brought from home out to the car. "You can drive me home now," she

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<sup>2</sup> Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology

announced. "The next time that Carla ever calls the laboratory", José later instructed Vernelle, "you are to tell her that you are unable to locate me!"

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Vernelle was a lovely lady with a charming manner and a bell-like voice. She was the first and, at that time, the only black secretary in the entire VA Hospital. In the beginning, with her charming manner, she was not very effective in handling unwanted telephone calls. Once, when José was operating on a small rabbit, a salesman who worked for a chemical supply house arrived. José explained that he was too busy to talk to the man, and the fellow left. An hour later, however, he telephoned. Vernelle burst in to announce that there was an urgent phone call for José. Leaving his experiment in the middle, José took the phone and found that it was the same salesman trying to sell him supplies. After hanging up, José told Vernelle, in no uncertain terms, that when he was in the middle of an important experiment, he should not be disturbed, and to tell whomever it was to call back another day. A few weeks later, Vernelle called over to José as he was preparing to walk out of the laboratory, after he had just finished work on a delicate procedure. With a satisfied smile, she announced, "See, now I know how to handle calls when you're busy. A man phoned and he wanted to talk to you, but I told him you were too busy to speak to him. I said that he shouldn't bother you, and that he should call back some other time."

"Did you get his name?" José asked.

"Of course," replied Vernelle. "It was Dr. Isadore Ravdin, Vice President of the University!"<sup>3</sup>

Vernelle was a most loyal secretary. She took her work seriously, and it disturbed her when anything went wrong. Soon after a new electric typewriter had been purchased for the Radioisotope Unit, Vernelle began to have problems with the instrument. Although she was experienced and an excellent typist, her writing began to jump, and both words and completed lines would be missing from her finished pages. Finally José called in a repairman from the typewriter company. This fellow worked for over an hour on the instrument, but was unable to find anything wrong with it. Finally, he asked Vernelle to sit down at the typewriter and show him how she operated it. It took no more than a moment for him to decipher the problem. Approaching José privately, he explained the situation. As Vernelle typed, she would unthinkingly lean against the keyboard. Without her realizing it, her heavy bosom would flop on the keys, causing the instrument to skip. To avoid

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<sup>3</sup> José's former superior from his army days, at that time a Major-General in the China-Burma-India Theater of War and, now, Head of all Medical Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania.

embarrassing Vernelle, José asked one of the female technicians to explain the situation to her, and the problem ceased immediately.

It was during this period that Bob would take to phoning José late at night (usually around two or three o'clock in the morning). He would tell José that he was seated in the bathtub, and that he felt extremely depressed. Would José care to come visit him, he would inquire, so they could talk. José politely demurred. Days later, two male patients passed by the laboratory holding hands. José expressed his surprise at seeing this in the hospital, and Bob immediately stopped what he was doing and launched into a lengthy explanation of how men have sex with each other.

The next day, Bob announced that he wanted to attend a meeting in a nearby town, and he insisted that José accompany him. José notified him that he suddenly found himself very ill and was unable to come in to work the next day. Shortly thereafter, Bob appeared at José's house to check if he was really sick. After this, José deliberately avoided ever being alone again with Bob. He never knew when Bob would be absent or present in the hospital, but Vernelle, as secretary of the Radioisotope Unit, always marked him present so that he would not lose his vacation time.

A few weeks later, three elderly ladies in Red Cross uniforms and carrying cans labeled "Red Cross" entered the Radioisotope Laboratory. After requesting permission, José allowed them to make a small pitch for the American Red Cross. This was at approximately 11:30 in the morning and, of course, José did not know if Bob was going to appear at work that day. In the middle of their speech, Bob suddenly walked in. After listening for a few seconds to what they were saying, he exploded. Shouting obscenities, Bob screamed that he had not given them permission to solicit for that cursed organization. He continued to curse the ladies themselves. At this point, the three women walked out. Bob then began a tirade about how horrible the American Red Cross was, and that nobody should ever support this organization. At this moment, in walked the Director of the hospital, accompanied by the three ladies. He told Bob, without mincing words, to "shut up" and let the ladies continue with their solicitation. Then everybody present, with the exception of Bob, approached the ladies and contributed funding, giving even in excess of what they would ordinarily have donated. The Director then asked Bob to come to his office. About three weeks later, Bob received a notification from his Draft Board. He had been drafted into the Air Force, and was told to report for duty to San Antonio at a given date. Bob ran to see the Director, hoping to have him get the orders revoked. The Director refused.

All this happened in early 1954. The Radioisotope Board then met and decided that José could be Acting Chief of the Service. They decided that consultants would be supplied under the three-month rotating plan, but that a larger

number of these physician-consultants would be required so that there would be no delays in treating patients. The Chief Medical Director in Washington (Dr. Middleton) flew in the next day and interviewed José for almost an hour. Then, the Chief of Medicine (Dr. Henry Close) came in and promised that the residents in Medicine would come at José's request to assist whenever help was needed if no consultants happened to be present. The Director (Dr. George Swanson) then presented José with a telegram signed by the Chief Medical Director stating that José was now officially running the Radioisotope Unit. This situation, with a few interruptions, continued to prevail for about fifteen years.

Bob would sometimes write to Vernelle and ask how things were going at the VA. Always with these letters, he would request that some reagents and chemicals from the laboratory be sent to him. He invariably insisted, however, that she do this "without telling José". Once, a few months after he had left, Bob's wife Carla suddenly appeared unannounced at the VA lab. "How is my husband's work coming along here?" she demanded. "Are you sure you're following all his instructions and doing everything he told you to?" José had all he could do to avoid replying, but continued with his work until Carla finally turned on her heel and left.

Eventually, Dr. John Hansell was recommended by Dr. Bernard Segal of Women's Medical College to run the department under the aegis of Women's Medical. One of the first things that John did when he arrived at the VA, however, to the distress of Dr. Segal and Women's Medical College, was to immediately apply for a staff appointment at the University of Pennsylvania.