Reflections on the Life of Nobel Laureate & IVF Pioneer Dr. Robert Edwards

by Dr. Samuel Kim

When I heard the news that Professor Bob Edwards passed away on April 10, 2013, I had mixed feelings of sadness and relief. It is sad that we will no longer see Bob—the most remarkable person in the history of reproductive medicine—but a relief that finally he can be free from his illness and rest in peace. Regarding his enormous achievement and contribution to medicine, suffice it to say that Bob forever changed the history of reproductive medicine, and millions of people are indebted to him for their precious gifts of life.

Professor Edwards was not only an extraordinary scientist and visionary, but also an enthusiastic educator. Indeed, several influential and eminent contemporary scientists started their careers as his former PhD students or post-doctoral research fellows, including my mentor, Roger Gosden. I met Bob about 15 years ago. I remember him as energetic, inquisitive, and kind. Physically, he was not a large person, but for me he was a giant who showed many young scientists how to follow the dream, even in adversity. Despite relentless criticism, he helped millions of patients suffering from infertility.

Professor Edwards received a PhD in physiology in 1955 from Edinburgh University and worked at the University of Cambridge most of his life. Aware of the pain infertile couples suffer, Bob was very keen on new infertility treatments. Stimulated by successful IVF in animals (conducted by Professor M.C. Chang in Boston in 1959), he was compelled to do research on human IVF. He teamed up with Dr. Patrick Steptoe and, after years of frustrating trials and errors, resilience finally prevailed. The historic moment came in July 1978 when the first IVF baby in the world, Louise Brown, was born at Oldham General Hospital in England.

As healthy babies are being born worldwide through IVF, Professor Edwards’ work has been recognized, and human IVF has become a clinically acceptable treatment for infertility. Indeed, approximately 5 million babies have been born through IVF since 1978. As a result, Bob was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2010. Some people still criticize his work, but no one will deny that Bob was the greatest pioneer of IVF—a pioneer who wrote a new chapter in the history of medicine. On the backs of these IVF giants, our team at KUMC continues to move forward with research and clinical services, providing the best possible outcomes to our patients. Thanks to a procedure perfected by Dr. Kim, certain female cancer patients may now elect to freeze their eggs prior to cancer treatments. This procedure later defrosts the frozen egg, bringing it to fertilization—and ultimately to birth. In 2012, the first baby resulting from this procedure was born.
A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Steady growth and development characterize the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Kansas. It is a constant challenge in this era of change to evolve as fast—or faster—than clinical medicine without losing sight of our mission and goal—to be a premier, nationally ranked academic center, changing the practice of OB-GYN in the future. Our primary faculty now number 30. We train 16 residents per year (4 per level) and collaborate, via secondary appointments in OB-GYN, with 5 professors based in other departments in both Kansas City and Lawrence. Two of our faculty—Drs. Gene Lee and Devika Maulik—are recipients of the prestigious, NIH-funded WOMEN’S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP intended to train future leaders in academic OB-GYN. The number of patient appointments increased this past year to nearly 45,000 encounters, which is an 11.8% increase compared to FY 2012. This summer, we will extend the provision of state-of-the-art services by the KU CENTER FOR ADVANCED FETAL CARE to Topeka and launch a new, regionally unique center of excellence—the KU CENTER FOR SEXUAL HEALTH AND BODY WELLNESS. The latter will provide a multidisciplinary team at our Nall office that will include healthcare providers from Gynecology, Urology, Psychology, and Physical Therapy. Together, they will care for complex problems of reproductive cancer survivorship, chronic pain, sexual dysfunction, and body image problems. The Center faculty have unique backgrounds allowing us to provide therapies for these challenging patients—therapies otherwise unavailable in the region. Stay tuned. The best is yet to come…

PREECLAMPSIA FUNDRAISING WALK

On May 18, 2013 the local chapter of the Preeclampsia Foundation hosted a fundraising walk at the Freshman Center of Blue Springs High School, located in Blue Springs, Missouri. Members of the Department’s faculty, administrative, and clinical staffs were part of the 289 participants in the one mile family fun walk. The event exceeded expectations and raised over $11,000. The proceeds from the events will be used to raise awareness via brochures and information to hospitals and doctors nationwide. It also goes towards research to fund grants nationwide to help find a cause and a cure for Preeclampsia. The Department looks forward to supporting an even larger event next year.

For more information on preeclampsia and other hypertensive disorders related to pregnancy which are a leading cause of maternal and infant illness and death, you can visit www.preeclampsia.org
The 5th Annual Sterling Williams Resident Research Forum was held in the University of Kansas Lied Auditorium on June 15th. This year the forum was honored to have Dr. Jimmie Gleason serve as the distinguished guest lecturer. Dr. Gleason completed both his medical degree and his residency at KU. He currently is the Chairman Emeritus of KaMMCO a medical insurance company which he started in 1989. In addition to his illustrious medical and business career, Dr. Gleason found time to support many community initiatives, specifically addressing the areas of healthcare for underserved women and children as well as programs enabling teen mothers to stay in school. He has also been a continual supporter of the University of Kansas as well as the Medical Center. The Department is proud to call him an alumnus.

Preceding and following Dr. Gleason’s talk were research presentations by the Department’s third and fourth year residents. These clinical research talks included “VTE Incidence Among Post-Operative Gynecologic Oncology Patients” by Dr. Alison Blevins and Dr. Jill Sampson, “Relation Between Constipation and Fecal Incontinence” by Dr. Sohee Williams, “Correlation Between LNG_IUD Placement as Determined by 3D Transvaginal Ultrasound and Patient Symptoms, A Prospective Trial” by Dr. Lindsay Norwald, “Impact of Robotic Surgical Availability and Choice of Obstetrics and Gynecology Resident Program” by Dr. Sharman Russell, “Development and Evaluation of a Module for Resident Training on a da Vinci Robotic System”, by Dr. Anna Soendker and “Quality and Improvement of Immunizations and Well Women Exams” by Dr. Rachel Van Horn.

The daytime activities were followed by the annual K.E. Krantz Society graduation dinner, held this year at Union Station. This year’s graduates include Dr. Alison Blevins, who will be joining Women’s Clinic of Johnson County, Dr. Jill Sampson will be joining the practice of Myers, Fitch and Riojas in Kansas City, Missouri, and Dr. Sohee Williams is going to Pacific Women’s Center in Eugene, Oregon.
KUMC Welcomes New Faculty and Residents

NEW FACULTY

Dr. Erin Carey
Minimally Invasive Surgery & Pelvic Pain

Dr. Stefanie Kempke
General Obstetrics & Gynecology

Dr. Marium Holland – MFM
Center for Advanced Fetal Care & High Risk Pregnancy

Dr. Marc Parrish – MFM
Center for Advanced Fetal Care & High Risk Pregnancy

RESIDENTS

Teresa Cothern
BS: University of Arkansas
MD: University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
College of Medicine

Frances Grimstad
BA: Sarah Lawrence College
MD: Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California

Erin Hecker
BS: University of Kansas
MD: University of Kansas School of Medicine

Jennifer Schuchmann
BS: Iowa State University
MD: University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine

DEPARTMENT ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2012-2013

Outstanding 2nd Year Resident
Erin McNulty, MD

Outstanding Senior Resident
Alison Blevins, MD

Outstanding Junior Resident
Elham Altaf, MD

Best Obstetrical Resident
Sohee Williams, MD

Outstanding Medical Student Educator
Erin McNulty, MD

Outstanding Clinician
Jill Sampson, MD

Outstanding Community Educator
Kimberly Brey, MD

NEW OFFICE OPENS IN TOPEKA

In August, the Center for Advanced Fetal Care added its sixth member to the team, Marc Parrish, DO. He joins us from the Saint Luke’s Hospital on the Plaza.

In conjunction with Dr. Parrish’s arrival, the Center will open its third location with an office in Topeka, KS. The new office will be able to better service patients in the surrounding communities such as Manhattan, Lawrence and Emporia. Dr. Parrish will provide fetal diagnostic services and consultations with the same level of service as our Kansas City and Overland Park locations. The office will also be equipped for telemedicine with our genetic counselor, Lisa Butterfield, stationed in Kansas City. Our goal is to alleviate the time and expense of traveling while providing access to the expertise of the Center for Advanced Fetal Care.
Sterling B. Williams, M.D., Ph.D., former chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, died after a brief illness on May 19. He was 72.

Dr. Williams was the vice president of education for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) in Washington, D.C., at the time of his death. He went to work at the membership organization after serving as the Kermit E. Krantz Professor and Chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology from 1997 to 2001. He was a driving force behind ACOG’s effort to build international collaborations and for more than a decade helped organize and run the organization’s annual meeting.

Dr. Williams joined the School of Medicine faculty after completing a residency in obstetrics and gynecology at KU in 1976. While at KU, he founded a program to use music therapy in the delivery room. A singer who performed with the Kansas City Philharmonic and the Kansas City Civic Chorus, he came up with the idea after a strenuous rehearsal. “I was tired, but I was also very relaxed,” he said in 1980. “I started wondering if there were some way it could be applied to my medical practice.”

Dr. Williams worked with music therapists to develop the program, which was believed to be the only one of its kind. Leading up to the due date, expectant mothers would meet with the therapists to build a list of songs — mostly instrumental, with faster beats when the patient’s energy needed to be mobilized — for playback during delivery. “It’s been a very beautiful experience,” Dr. Williams said. “The parents are happier and finding it much more pleasant. The nurses enjoy it, and I like having music play while we work.”

Dr. Williams was an assistant professor in obstetrics and gynecology and associate professor of family practice when, in 1986, he left to teach at Columbia University and to serve as the Ob-Gyn director at Harlem Hospital. He returned to KU in 1997 as chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Long after he moved to Washington, Dr. Williams remained an active supporter of the Ob-Gyn program at KU Medical Center, providing sound advice on a number of topical issues, according to Department Chairman, Dr. Carl Weiner. The annual resident research day was named the Sterling Williams Research Forum five years ago. Weiner says Williams was expected to attend this year’s event. “His absence will be felt by all,” he said.

Born and raised in Little Rock, Ark., Dr. Williams earned a bachelor’s degree in zoology from the University of Illinois, a master’s degree in physiology from Northern Illinois University and his doctor of medicine and Ph.D. from the University of Arkansas. Dr. Williams is survived by his wife, Joice, and three children.

Reception Honors Faculty from Christian Medical College, Vellore, India.

On June 18 and 19, the Director of the Christian Medical College (CMC), Dr. Sunil Chandy (cardiology) and his wife, Dr. Achamma Chandy (OBGYN) toured the KUMC campus as part of their two week tour of the United States. CMC and KUMC have many ties that extend back several decades. In 2006, with the generous support of KUMC alumni, the University created a scholarship program to send students from Medicine, Nursing, and Health Profession to CMC for their clinical rotations. Two years later, the Modale Scholars Program was created to bring Junior Faculty from CMC to KUMC to enhance their research training.

This trip was an opportunity for both institutions to strengthen their existing programs and explore new opportunities. Due to her interest in infertility, Dr. Chandy had the chance to tour the REI clinic and visit with faculty and staff at the Department’s Overland Park Location regarding programs and protocols specific to the Department. She also toured the MFM research facilities with Dr. Yafeng Dong, as well as the Labor and Delivery and the NICU units with the Chairman, Dr. Carl Weiner.
In the middle of May, Department faculty member Dr. Samuel Kim traveled to Vietnam as a guest lecturer. On May 15 he was invited to speak at the 13th Vietnam-France-Asia-Pacific conference on Obstetrics and Gynecology in Ho Chi Minh City. He gave two lectures, the first entitled: “Fertility Preservation in the Female,” and the second “Ovarian Cryobanking: From Science to Clinical Practice.” He was also invited to present a third talk—“Technical Aspects of Ovarian Tissue Cryopreservation and Transplantation” at Tu Du Hospital, the largest women’s hospital in Vietnam with a delivery rate of 60,000 babies a year.

As part of his trip, Dr. Kim also met with the Deans of Ho Chi Minh Medicine, Pharmacy University and Pham Ngoc Thach University of Medicine. His goal is to create future collaborations between the University of Kansas and these institutions in the area of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility.

Tu Du Hospital, Ho Chi Minh City.