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THE BOSTON & MAINE CONNECTION

Running Away from a Cure?

Shocking news to many of us, but not to the scientific community, is the future outcome of the growing gap of funded research. Recent breakthroughs to slowing terrible diseases are often the result of ten to twenty or more years of research. The breakthroughs we see today, exist because our parents' generation invested in pure research. Our government in the 1980's & 90's saw to it that the National Institute of Health gave out significant grants for research to the nation's colleges to insure todays breakthroughs in gene sequencing. The genome has led the way to precision medicine.

I learned these things at the National Press Club in Washington DC last month, where Dr. Fred Alt of Boston Children's Hospital and a Howard Hughes Medical institute Investigator as well as a Professor of Genetics at Harvard Medical School, was being honored for his lifelong work.

Dr. Alt was in Washington DC to receive the prestigious Szent-Gyorgyi Prize for Progress in Cancer Research from the National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR). This prize was named for 1937 Nobel Laureate Albert Szent-Gyorgyi of Vitamin C fame. United States Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts was the keynote speaker. Both Dr. Alt and Senator Markey shared the theme that was echoed by many of the research scientists there to honor one of their own. Our current medical breakthroughs are the result of investment in the research, twenty and more years ago, of earlier generations of scientists doing pure science.

These venues allowed for accidental discoveries that led to more focused breakthroughs in treatment of some of humankinds most feared diseases. Today, however, with significant curtailment of federal funding and the introduction of Venture Capitalist investments focused on more



precise commercial results means a growing gap between Return on Investment (ROI) focused research and any chance of random discoveries to help the next and much, much smaller generation of researchers.

I asked Dr. Alt about his biggest concerns for the future and his answer was as direct as it was concerning. With NIH cuts to school research labs we have all but eliminated jobs for Post Doc Researchers in labs. Potential future scientists are driven away from research right out of the starting block. Without funding, Post Doc researchers can't afford to stay in the field. No research. No funding. No future discoveries.

The popular campaigns for any specific human cancer of interest (breast, lung, prostate, etc.) is really Old School when genome breakthroughs in places like Broad Institute in Cambridge Massachusetts are beginning to allow for investigations of the source of, rather than the manifestation of, a person's disease, the metastasis of which is the real killer. Precision medicine is a new, growing and exciting frontier for health at the intersection of technology and personal, precision medicine.

I have taken an interest in the work of David Bjork and the NFCR. Their rallying cry is the purple ribbon, for all cancers because they know that funding pure research is the best thing we can do to put the next generation into the laboratory. Small grants of as little as \$50,000 can provide a one year guarantee of employment for a Post Doc Candidate in a promising path of research. In the past forty years, the NFCR has distributed over \$300 Million dollar to researchers all over the United States. New Hampshire, noted for First in the Nation primaries has now added another first with the New Hampshire Youth Lacrosse Association creating Statewide support by one sports league of NFCR's cornerstone fund raising and awareness vehicle, Play for the Cure.

Play for the Cure is in Londonderry, NH on June 13th. Would you like to step up and start this in Maine or Boston? For more information, check out <http://www.nfcr.org/p4tc> or call NFCR at 301-654-1250. Robert will most likely answer the phone. You'll see why I call him the Director of First Impressions. Tell him Keith sent you.



THE BOSTON & MAINE CONNECTION, *a monthly column hosted by Keith Spiro and Marketplace Access and Understanding LLC.*

Keith has more than thirty years invested in the Boston & Maine connection. He is a business strategist and community builder, interested in high impact projects that can make a difference for communities.

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