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The 8th Annual Summer Seminar: Gina Kolata Science Writer, *The New York Times*

Jamie Howell, PharmD*

Mirko Sikiria, PharmD*

* Thomas Jefferson University

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The 8th Annual Summer Seminar: Gina Kolata Science Writer, *The New York Times*

The Office of Health Policy and Clinical Outcomes hosted the 8th Annual Summer Seminar on July 12, 2002. Gina Kolata, keynote speaker and award-winning science reporter for *The New York Times*, addressed over 150 healthcare professionals in her presentation entitled "Beyond Cloning."

Kolata, a science writer for nearly 30 years, began by recalling her first encounter in 1997 with the concept of cloning. "It sounded like an incredible long shot," she remembered thinking before reading the article published in *Nature* in which British researchers reported creating a lamb using DNA from adult sheep. Kolata subsequently followed up with a front-page story for the *Times*. "It was how the world came to know that cloning actually succeeded," she said.

Since she first broke the story of cloning, Kolata, who holds a master's degree in mathematics from the University of Maryland, has emerged as a key news writer on the topic. She is also the author of "Clone: The Road to Dolly, and the Path Ahead" (William Morrow, 1999), a journalist's account of the creation of the first cloned sheep and its scientific and ethical implications.

The issue of cloning ties into stem cell research, another area that Kolata said is full of high expectations. She explained in simple terms the complex difficulties of stem cell research, such as identifying stem cells in tissue cultures that contain numerous types of cells. "There is an obsessive optimism about how stem cell research is going to treat disease," she said, comparing the over-promise of stem cell therapy to that of gene therapy.

Journalists play a difficult role in communicating the achievements of science accurately, and Kolata emphasized the care that must be taken when interacting with scientists who are eager to get their views published. "As a journalist, I always ask a lot of questions and ask to see data and have them explained."

From a journalist's perspective, Kolata is cautiously optimistic about the future of therapeutic cloning and controlling diseases through stem cell therapy. While it is not right around the corner, "it's at least envisionable," she said, but added, "Hype and hope continually get ahead of reality. What you hear and what's happening are not always the same thing."

Kolata's presentation was followed by comments from a reactor panel that included Elizabeth A. Mansfield, PhD, Biologist and Senior Reviewer for the Immunology and Molecular Diagnostics Division of Clinical Lab Devices in the Office of Drug Evaluation in the Food and Drug Administration, and Thomas Jefferson faculty members Kay Huebner, PhD, Professor, Kimmel Cancer Center; Bruce M. Boman, MD, PhD, Director of the Division of Genetic and Preventive Medicine; and Timothy Block, MD, Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Pharmacology.

For information about upcoming events at the Office of Health Policy, please call (215) 955-6969 or visit www.tju.edu/OHP/.

About the Authors

Jamie Howell, PharmD, is the Janssen Pharmaceutica Fellow and Mirko Sikirica, PharmD, is the Glaxosmithkline Outcomes Research Fellow in the Office of Health Policy and Clinical Outcomes at Thomas Jefferson University.