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# The Birth of a New Department at MCV/VCU—Human Genetics

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In recognition of the central role of genetics in the health professions, the MCV/VCU School of Basic Sciences and Graduate Studies substantially enlarged its commitment to this discipline by creating a new Department of Human Genetics as of September 1, 1975, under the chairmanship of Walter E. Nance, M.D., Ph.D., an internationally renowned medical geneticist. Dr. Nance comes to Richmond from Indianapolis where he was Professor of Medicine and Medical Genetics at the Indiana University School of Medicine. Here at MCV/VCU, Dr. Nance will also have joint appointments in both the Departments of Medicine and Pediatrics.

This event is the culmination of a successful 37-year effort to develop a genetics program at the Medical College of Virginia. One can be quite certain that when Dr. Roscoe D. Hughes first assumed the chairmanship of the newly formed one-man Department of Biology and Genetics in the School of Pharmacy in 1938, he could not have foreseen the explosion of knowledge in genetics that would occur during the next four decades. Through his efforts alone, genetics was first taught to medical students in 1947 and then to dental students in 1950. The faculty expanded to two in 1948. By 1965, the Department had grown to five members to meet the ever-increasing demand for instruction in genetics, and research programs had begun dealing with *Drosophila*, laboratory mice and human twins. The first advanced degree in genetics was awarded in 1953, and since that time, more than a dozen master and doctoral degrees in genetics have been granted, with research being directed by faculty members Richard Cribbs in biochemical genetics, Ives Townsend in population genetics, and

Frederick J. Grundbacher in immunogenetics, as well as Dr. Hughes.

At the time of Dr. Hughes' retirement as chairman in 1970, the Department of Biology and Genetics was administratively reorganized into a Program of Human Genetics because of the increasing demand for instruction in human genetics by all health professions in the School of Basic Sciences and Graduate Studies. Doctor Richard Cribbs served as chairman of the new program and changed its emphasis by recruiting a faculty member with special expertise in human cytogenetics and by encouraging active collaboration with faculty members in the Departments of Biology, Biophysics, Microbiology, Orthodontics, and Pediatrics. To fulfill an important need for physicians and residents of the State, a Genetics Counseling Clinic was initiated in February, 1971, in collaboration with the Department of Pediatrics. Because of an increasing case load the frequency of the clinic sessions was subsequently increased from once to twice monthly in 1973, and financial support was sought and obtained from the Virginia Capital Area Chapter of the National Foundation-March of Dimes. The burgeoning of other research and service programs in human genetics in the MCV/VCU complex including the Tay-Sachs carrier detection program in the Departments of Pediatrics and Pathology, the sickle-cell screening program in the Department of Medicine, the transplantation genetics program in the Department of Surgery, the metabolic and cytogenetic services in the Department of Pediatrics, and the amniocentesis program in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology over the past few years has clearly demon-

strated the need for a more coordinated effort in human genetics, and provided further impetus for the expansion of the Human Genetics program to a full departmental status.

Dr. Nance was previously the principal investigator of the Indiana University Human Genetics Center grant, one of ten such awards made by the National Institute of General Medical Science to support research in genetics. At Indiana, Dr. Nance directed a broad range of research in human genetics including studies of human twins and their families, clinical and population studies of hereditary deafness, and studies dealing with the delineation of new genetic syndromes, genetic linkage, and human biochemical genetics. A graduate of the University of the South and Harvard Medical School, Dr. Nance became interested in genetics during his medical

housestaff training at Vanderbilt, and subsequently obtained a Ph.D. in Genetics in 1968 from the University of Wisconsin, under the direction of Dr. Oliver Smithies.

Initially, Dr. Nance plans to resume and expand the pioneering twin studies begun by Dr. Hughes two decades ago. Other immediate concerns include strengthening and coordinating the cytogenetics and prenatal diagnosis programs and expansion of the genetic counseling program. The Departmental offices and laboratories are housed in 5000 square feet on the 11th floor of Sanger Hall, while outpatient activities are conducted in Randolph Minor Hall, which has recently been renovated with support from the local chapter of the March of Dimes. Additional faculty members are being recruited to help achieve the expanded goals of the new Department.