

New England Science Symposium Keynote Speaker Jeremy M. Berg, PhD

JEREMY M. BERG, PHD, DIRECTOR OF the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), believes it is important to have a diverse pool of scientific researchers for a number of reasons. "Having people from diverse backgrounds, with different approaches to problems, is crucial to solving our problems," he says. He also notes that in an area in which you want the best talent possible, there should be "an open system in which everyone feels welcome."

Berg delivered the keynote address at the 2009 New England Science Symposium. The NIGMS supports more than 4,500 research grants — about 10 percent of all the grants funded by the NIH — as well as research training and programs, including those designed to increase the number of minority biomedical scientists. The grants are awarded to various institutions, with opportunities for minority research from the undergraduate through the post-doctoral level. In one program, post-doctoral fellows, in addition to conducting research, teach at partner minority-serving institutions, so they also gain experience with curriculum development and teaching.

Berg comes from an academic background. He grew up on the Stanford University campus, where his father was a mathematician and his mother was a hematologist. He attended a nearby public school that was next to Stanford graduate student housing; the school had a very diverse student body that included students from 30 countries.

He says he became interested in chemistry at a young age, and after receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in the subject from Stanford, he earned his PhD in chemistry



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from Harvard University. But while Berg was at Harvard, his work became "more biologically motivated," he says. He decided, before finishing his degree, that he was more interested in biology than chemistry and did post-doctoral work at The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, where he spent 13 years before joining the NIH.

Berg is optimistic about the future of biomedical sciences and full of encouragement for students who are considering a career in the field. "From a scientific perspective, I can't imagine a more exciting time [than now] to be involved in biomedical science," he says. "It is now possible to work on things that had been so intractable before." He does warn that the career path is "a lot more stressful than it used to be," with a constant need to write grants and "eat what you kill." But he points to the NIH's recent \$10 billion infusion from the

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federal government, as part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, as a hopeful sign of things to come.

"There are actually a fair number of career paths for researchers," he advises. "Even if you're doing a PhD, there are a couple of paths to consider." He notes that students should always pursue their passions and keep their minds and options open. "My career has taken paths I never would have imagined," he says. ■

2009 EVENING OF HOPE

THE 12TH ANNUAL Evening of Hope will take place on April 30 at The Boston Park Plaza Hotel. The event, which raises money to fund BSCP programs and celebrates the successes the BSCP has helped achieve in our community, will be chaired by Gary Gottlieb, MD, MBA, president of Brigham and Women's Hospital, and Richard F. Pops, chairman of the board of Alkermes, Inc.

The 2009 honorees will be Joshua Boger, PhD, president and chief executive officer of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, and Cleve Killingsworth, chairman and chief executive officer of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

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Student Profile Sherry-Ann Brown

COMING TO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY in Connecticut as a freshman was a bit more of an adjustment for Jamaica native Sherry-Ann Brown than she had anticipated. Beyond the climate change from the Caribbean to New England, she was homesick. But she found a local church, joined the Christian fellowship on campus, made friends quickly and found that, "after the first semester, it got much better."

She certainly got used to Connecticut. After receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in physics from Wesleyan, Sherry-Ann moved on to the University of Connecticut (UConn) Health Center, where she is now in her fifth year of an MD/PhD program. Her primary interest, she says, has always been medicine, but "it would be awesome to do both medicine and research. The part of medicine that has been most alluring to me has been cardiovascular disease. I've also had some interest in neuroscience and cerebrovascular disease." Her PhD is devoted to analyzing and modeling the relationship of a set of neurons in the cerebellum to a lack of motor coordination.

At UConn, medical students begin shadowing physicians from their first semester. Sherry-Ann worked in a hypertension clinic and learned immediately that she loves interacting with patients. She also enjoys community service and is an active participant in the school's numerous student-run clinics that

offer free services to patients. Among her activities, she helps run a faith-based wellness center in Hartford.

Sherry-Ann presented a poster at the most recent New England Science Symposium (NESS), on April 3. It was her fifth NESS presentation, since she first learned about the BSCP through the Career Resources Center at Wesleyan. She has also attended four BSCP conferences, and she received a Hope Scholarship in 2004. She says about her first conference, "It was so nice to see such a large group of people helping each other succeed... and also meeting mentors and advisors eager to help you find your place in biomedical science."

"A lot of what I've accomplished has been with the help of mentors and advisors from BSCP and Wesleyan, and now UConn," she says, "but a good amount was through my own research about academic programs and resources." One thing she learned early on was that several resources available to U.S. citizens and permanent residents are not equally accessible to international students; for example, some MD and MD/PhD programs do not accept and/or fund international students. However, rather than letting this discourage her, Sherry-Ann merely worked harder to find programs that met her needs.

"I received a Hope Scholarship from BSCP in 2004 that I really appreciated. I realized that they weren't just giving me money. It symbolized their support of my starting to explore my place in biomedical science," she says. "It helped me purchase a laptop required by medical school. It also helped fund one of my medical mission trips to the Dominican Republic, which had a significant academic component."

For Sherry-Ann, the future is open after she completes her degrees. She may stay in the U.S. as a physician scientist, return to Jamaica, work in the Dominican Republic, or in Spain, where she has studied. Wherever she ends up, she will be doing what she loves, and helping people will be an important part of the equation. ■



SHERRY-ANN BROWN



New England Science Symposium

The Judges' Perspective

THE NEW ENGLAND SCIENCE Symposium (NESS), where fellows; medical, dental, graduate, college and community college students; and post-baccalaureates present their research in the form of oral and poster presentations, is not just an opportunity for those presenting. In many ways, it is an opportunity for poster and oral presentation judges, drawn from the greater Boston academic and biomedical industry, to meet future researchers and physicians — some of whom may be working in the judges' laboratories or businesses as a result of their interactions at the symposium.

Richard J. Gregory, PhD, senior vice president and head of research at Genzyme Corporation, is a strong NESS supporter who says his participation as a judge for the last three years has convinced him of the value of the event. It gives "a lot of young scientists the opportunity to interact with peers and future peers from academia and industry in a way they may not get anywhere else," he notes. "There are very high-level academics from the Boston area and a cross-section of industry that's unique."

Among the benefits to judges, he says, "You identify talent, [and] you actually learn stuff." Every year, Gregory is impressed by the posters and presentations he sees — particularly

those by the undergraduates and community college students, who "have come out with very sophisticated research." He says he expects the high level of accomplishment from graduate students.

Typically, Gregory distributes his business cards to presenters and usually ends up exchanging emails with a few of them. But "most [of them] are inclined toward academic careers and/or medical school. We would love to see students apply to Genzyme for jobs."

Frederick Berkovitch, PhD, a lecturer on systems biology and curriculum coordinator in the Department of Systems Biology at Harvard Medical School, also became involved with the NESS three years ago, initially supporting the event as one form of outreach for his division. He was a poster judge in 2008 and 2009. "I'm always trying to recruit students at events like this and at other events," he says.

"I thought they [the posters and presentations] were good quality. I enjoyed it." Most of his conversations with students have been focused on their posters. "You get to meet a lot of students," he says. "I feel, overall, quite positive about this [event]." ■

2009 EVENING OF HOPE

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Four people who have devoted their energies to the BSCP over the years will be named to the 2009 Honor Roll: Jessica Henderson Daniel, PhD, ABPP, psychologist, Child Protection Team, director of training in psychology, and associate director of Leadership Education and Adolescent Health at Children's Hospital Boston; Richard J. Gregory, PhD, senior vice president and head of research at Genzyme Corporation; Joel T. Katz, MD, director, Internal Medicine Residency and the Department of Internal Medicine, and vice chair for Medical Education at Brigham and Women's Hospital; and James L. Sherley, MD, PhD, senior scientist at Boston Biomedical Research Institute.

Four students will receive \$7,500 Hope Scholarships, provided by sponsors Biogen Idec Foundation, Boston Scientific Corporation, the Fleming Family Foundation and Genzyme Corporation. The 2009 scholarship recipients are: Jonathan Abraham, MD/PhD candidate, 2012, Harvard Medical School/Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Jarrad Mattieu Aguirre, BS candidate, 2009, Yale University; Eydith Comenencia, PhD candidate, 2012, Tufts University Sackler School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences; and Vadim Villarroel, MD candidate, 2012, The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. ■

At the NESS

THE 12 ORAL PRESENTERS AND THE 132 poster presenters came from 23 states, Puerto Rico and Mexico, and represented 81 institutions. In addition to the keynote address by Dr. Jeremy M. Berg, PhD, there was a panel, "Road to Science: Navigating Your Career," moderated by Carl E. Reid, PhD, scientist II at Biogen Idec. Reid is a BSCP student advisor and former BSCP student and Hope Scholarship recipient. Panel members were Todd G. Reid, MPH, MSc, ScD candidate, Department of

Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health and Sloan Fellow, Program in Innovation and Global Leadership, Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Pamela A. Silver, PhD, program director for the PhD program in systems biology and professor of systems biology at Harvard Medical School; Bodo Stern, PhD, director of research affairs, FAS Center for systems biology at Harvard University; and Gordon Wong, DPhil, vice president, new ventures at Biogen Idec. ■

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Save the Dates

Evening of Hope
April 30, 2009
The Boston Park Plaza Hotel
Annual fundraiser to benefit BSCP

Career Development Series
Federal Funding Opportunities
October 2009

Harvard Medical School
For physicians in postdoctoral training,
junior faculty and fellows (clinical and
research)

Biomedical Science Careers
Student Conference
February 26 and 27, 2010
The Westin Hotel Copley Place
For fellows, medical/dental/graduate/college/
community college students, and high school
seniors and juniors

New England Science Symposium
February 28, 2010

The Joseph B. Martin Conference Center
at Harvard Medical School
For fellows and medical/dental/graduate/
college/community college students

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