

## Second Friday Science Socials

When I was a resident, notices were posted every Friday afternoon throughout the hospital for “Liver Rounds,” to be held at 5:00 pm. “Liver” was used as a code word for medical staff to signify that alcohol (usually beer) would be served, while the euphemism “Liver rounds” was used presumably to suggest to others in the hospital that some sort of educational activity was about to occur. Sometimes, just for good measure, Liver Rounds was announced over the loudspeaker at 4:45 pm.

This quaint custom has appeared to go by the wayside. Maybe it's that our housestaff and faculty all want to get home to their families. Maybe we would have to count Liver rounds as part of the 80-hour rule for residents. When I googled “Liver Rounds,” all I came up with were listings of real GI and Pathology conferences. Go figure.

The Second Friday Science Social is our contemporary and more scientifically-focused version of Liver Rounds. (And it is more refined—we serve wine as well as beer.) One evening in late 2005, Dirk Bohmann, PhD, Professor of Biomedical Genetics, and Howard Federoff, MD, PhD (then Senior Associate Dean for Basic Science), were together in the Strathallan Hotel for a faculty dinner. Dirk conveyed that while he had a general idea about the research going on in different departments and centers at the University, he hadn't seen or heard much about it first hand. In fact, it was often more likely to hear faculty members from other U of R departments talk about their science at a conference halfway around the globe than at home in Rochester!

Dirk expostulated: “This is too bad! Faculty members at the school should appreciate their academic and scientific environment; otherwise we might lose them to other institutions. We should let the students and post-docs experience more of the exciting research that is conducted here. Also, we miss out on potential interactions and collaborative work, simply because people are not aware what's going on. We should have some forum or platform that represents the breadth and the excellence of our research and at the same time fosters a spirit of excellence and a feeling of community. I do not understand why nobody is doing this!” Howard looked at Dirk and said: “I think you're right: *You* do it!”

That's not exactly what Dirk had bargained for but he realized that he had talked himself into a tight spot. So, not long after that Lynne Maquat, PhD, Professor of Biochemistry and Biophysics and Frank Gigliotti, MD, Professor of Pediatrics, joined Dirk and Howard to plan the series. They quickly agreed on a format:

- Monthly seminars on a Friday afternoon
- Speakers in the general areas of biological and medical research (later expanded, see below) from all departments at the medical school and from the college campus.
- Lectures were to be targeted to non-specialist scientists. Broad introductions and an overview of the field were encouraged.
- Speakers are introduced by colleagues who know them as scientists as well as human beings. These Introductions should be more personal than the usual rattling down of CVs and awards, and introducers are encouraged to be creative and inject light hearted comments.
- To facilitate social and scientific exchange, following the lecture drinks and snacks would be served. So, the whole event should feel like a hybrid of a trans-departmental seminar series and Friday happy hour. The Dean's office generously provided the funds for food and drinks.

The name "Second Friday Science Social" was chosen mainly because the second Friday of the month was the easiest slot to wrest the Case Methods Room, their favorite venue, away from the medical student teaching. A website was created, speakers were recruited and the kick-off lecture was in March 2006. Dr. Bohmann recalls the first Second Friday Science Social: "This was an excellent and well-attended presentation by Allen Orr from the Biology Department, introduced by Daven Presgraves. Allen gave an inspiring lecture about the problem of how new species arise during evolution (incidentally, the one topic that is not covered in Darwin's "Origin of Species"). The Orr seminar was a good example for a topic, evolution in this case, that touches the science of many of us, but that we usually do not think, let alone read about much."

Many interesting lectures have followed. Highlights include talks by John Treanor, MD, Professor of Medicine, on flu epidemics, Mark Noble, PhD, Professor of Biomedical Genetics on Stem cells in science and politics, and by Fred Sherman, PhD, Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry and Biophysics, about the rise of baker's yeast to one of the most prominent biological model systems. These, like many other talks, presented a mixture of cutting edge science with history, politics or public health issues that were highly appreciated by the audience.

Shortly after becoming Medical Center CEO, Brad Berk, MD, PhD, gave a presentation on "Atheroprotective effects of steady blood flow." That lecture, and the social hour that followed, was memorable to him because it was the first time he spoke on that topic here, despite having presented it nationally many times. Surprisingly some of our best scientists are better known elsewhere or the full breadth of their expertise is not appreciated locally. Furthermore, Dr. Berk feels that there is broader importance to the Second Friday Science Socials at the medical center: "Science is a community that grows together, even though every scientist has his or her own perspective. Bringing the community together to hear excellence in inquiry and discovery cements the bonds that make us strive to achieve. For me the diversity of science at UPMC and the excellence come together at these meetings, making them extremely valuable."

Dr. Bohman notes that "introductions were often quite imaginative and memorable. They ranged from reverent to gently mocking, but in all cases they raised appreciation for the speaker and the topic and set the stage for a relaxed, yet interesting, Friday afternoon. Following the lectures, speakers and audience congregate over wine, beer and snacks to discuss the lecture, science, or the upcoming weekend."

In the two years since its inception, the Second Friday Science Social has become a fixture for many members of the U of R community, and has raised an appreciation for the quality and the range of our scientific, intellectual and cultural enterprise. The smooth organization of the series is credited to Jill van Atta who, with help from the postdoc association, manages food, lecture rooms, announcements and a lot of other details behind the scenes that make the whole series enjoyable for all of us.

Here are some thoughts about the value of the Second Friday Science Social Series from some "regulars":

Steve Dewhurst, PhD, Senior Associate Dean for Basic Science: "The Second Friday Science Social is our most important and most successful intramural scientific seminar series. What's great about it is the chance to hear from the outstanding faculty right in our midst - people who are invited to give prestigious seminars all over the world, but who we rarely get the chance to learn from back here "at home." Some of my favorite aspects of this seminar series are the introductions, and the chance to learn what really makes people tick. When Dick Moxley described Charles Thornton's unique path from Africa to Rochester, I got a real understanding of how remarkable Charles is, and the extent of his compassion and caring. It's also a great opportunity to learn something new. Elissa Newport's

presentation was completely outside my personal "comfort zone," and I came away with a profound sense of wonder at the way we learn language."

Frank Gigliotti, MD, Professor of Pediatrics: "To me the value of this series is that it gives us the chance to see all the important work being done outside our individual small domains. This is what a "University" is supposed to be all about. The structure of the presentations also gives a peek into the human side of our illustrious faculty. Who knew that Tim Mosmann is a gearhead! My most memorable lecture was that of Fred Sherman. His brilliance was evidenced early in his post-doctoral career when after rooting through zoo animal feces (Fred used the more colorful term) for a considerable period of time looking for a yeast phage, Fred drew the insightful conclusion that he needed a new project. The rest is history."

Eric Phizicky, PhD, Professor of Biochemistry and Biophysics: "These talks are an invaluable and unique tool for conveying the importance and attraction of problems in one discipline to professionals in other unrelated disciplines, at a level that is understandable to all. These talks are also invaluable in bringing a sense of community to URMC, by exposing large numbers of people to specific disciplines about which they would not normally hear, in a setting that is both collegial and friendly. The introductions are great. They have provided a fascinating look at the speakers, and at the introducers themselves, at a level that is often lighthearted, warm, funny, and informative. One introduction in particular that stands out is that of Dirk Bohmann, who introduced Hucky Land while wearing a Hucky-like beard and wig, and while mimicking a number of his mannerisms. The standing-room-only crowd enjoyed it immensely."

Craig Jordan, PhD, Associate Professor of Medicine in the James P. Wilmot Cancer Center: "The Second Friday Science Social is a unique event for the Rochester academic community. It draws an incredibly diverse group of people together for what is invariably a stimulating and educational experience. Although there have been many memorable moments, one of my personal favorites was hearing the Haiku that Nick Crispe composed as part of his introduction for Tim Mosmann's lecture."

Helene McMurray, PhD, Post-doctoral Fellow, Department of Biomedical Genetics: "The Second Friday Science Socials have done a lot to bring together scientists from diverse backgrounds, so that we may appreciate each others' work, and learn from the approaches of others. Especially for early career scientists, such as post-docs, the cross-communication allows us to see things from new points of view. It also affords an opportunity to get out of the lab and interact with other scientists here at the University. By making it a social event, the series creates a non-threatening environment for anyone interested to try to learn something new. It has been fascinating to see talks from such diverse fields as cardiology, when Arthur Moss spoke of his work on heart failure, and vision research, when Dave Williams spoke of his work on photoreceptors and retinopathy. These are fields that a scientist in cancer genetics, such as me, would not normally experience. Even talks closer to home, such as Mark Noble's presentation on stem cell biology and the politics surrounding stem cells, put his work into a larger context and allowed both those in the know and the uninitiated to understand the science and the larger issues."

Encouraged by the positive response to such a multi-faceted range of topics, Dr. Bohmann et al. decided "to go all out and create a special 'End of the Year Edition' for the Second Friday Science Social in which we would invite a speaker from the fine arts side of the University. Steven Laitz, Chair of the Music Theory Department, at the Eastman School of Music graciously and bravely agreed to take on the December lecture in 2006. He arrived with his own piano in the class of '62 auditorium to give examples for his explanations of how music works and why we appreciate it. This remarkable lecture was truly a highlight of the series. We instantly decided to reserve the December slot to the humanists and invited local artist and chairman of the Art and Art History Department Allen Topolski

to give the talk in 2007. His presentation too was an insightful, thought-provoking and altogether out-of-the-box talk for a medical school setting.”

The upcoming lecture on March 14<sup>th</sup> will be presented by Robert (Berch) Griggs, MD, Chair of the Department of Neurology. Berch will be introduced by Gary Myers, MD, Professor of Neurology. Dr. Griggs is not only a world-renowned scientist and the Chair of the Department of Neurology, but he served for 10 years as editor of *Neurology*. This is the official journal of the American Academy of Neurology, the major national society of neurologists, for which Dr. Griggs will serve as President beginning in 2009. His talk at the Second Friday Science Social relates to an important topic at the interface between science, publication and ethics: "Plagiarism: The Crime and the Punishment." We strongly encourage students, postdocs, residents and faculty to attend.

Meliora,

David S. Guzick, MD, PhD  
Dean, School of Medicine & Dentistry