Henry H. Balfour, Jr., M.D.
2007 Ed Nowakowski Senior Memorial Clinical Virology Award
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Hank Balfour established the Clinical Virology Laboratory at the University of Minnesota in November 1972 and has been its Medical Director ever since. The laboratory offers state-of-the-art diagnostic virology, including quantitative molecular assays for CMV, EBV, BK, and hepatitis C. Four of his students have won a best poster award at the annual meeting of the Pan American Society for Clinical Virology. One of them is now in Medical School and another will be entering a Ph.D. program in Molecular Biology this summer.

Hank has been involved in prospective studies of viral infections in transplant patients since the early 1970s. He designed and directed the first clinical trial to show that acyclovir prevented CMV disease after renal transplantation (N Engl J Med 1989). He is currently working on a prospective trial to investigate predictors of EBV-associated posttransplant lymphoproliferative disease (PTLD) in solid organ transplant patients. In conjunction with this, he is the principal investigator of several studies on infectious mononucleosis in University of Minnesota students. These are being done in order to establish a baseline of viral and host interactions in immunocompetent patients, which will be compared with the aberrant responses in the immunocompromised host to understand how to intervene to prevent or treat PTLD. The first of the monob studies was recently published (J Infect Dis 2005) and the second will be in the in May 2007 issue the Journal of Clinical Virology.

He has conducted approximately 20 single center and multicenter treatment trials using antiviral drugs. His studies of acyclovir for varicella-zoster virus (VZV) infections in both immunocompromised and otherwise healthy patients are considered to be pivotal in establishing the role of antiviral drugs for management of VZV infections (Lancet 1982, N Engl J Med 1983, Pediatr Infect Dis J 2001). As a result, he has been asked to write several chapters on management of VZV infections including one that was translated into Italian.

The AIDS Clinical Trials Unit at the University of Minnesota has enrolled more than 2,000 HIV-infected individuals in clinical trials of antiretroviral drugs and treatments for opportunistic diseases associated with HIV/AIDS. Hank has been its principal investigator since 1987 and also served on the AIDS Clinical Trials Group’s Executive Committee, was its vice-chair for one year, and was chairman of the Virology Committee for 3 years. He is coauthor of numerous publications describing the results of HIV/AIDS clinical trials. Unfortunately, the NIH did not refund the Minnesota unit and government support is currently being phased out. Fortunately, Hank established the University of Minnesota International Center for Antiviral Research and Epidemiology (I CARE) in 1995 with gifts from patients’ families, friends, and industry. The I CARE funds will permit subjects to complete their antiretroviral treatment protocols.

The editors of the New England Journal of Medicine published his review article on antiviral therapy in 1999 and this is still is one of the most widely cited articles in the field.

The University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview gave Hank their Clinical Scholar Award in 2005 in recognition of his scientific contributions in Clinical Virology.