Jacob Lemann, Jr., MD—The Milwaukee Years

Lee A. Hebert

Ohio State University College of Medicine, Columbus, Ohio

(J. Am. Soc. Nephrol. 1994; 5:55)

The watershed event in Jack Lemann's academic career occurred in 1961 when he and E.J. Lennon, then a rising young star at Marquette University School of Medicine, met in the laboratory of their mentor, Dr. Arnold J. Relman of Boston University. E.J. was there as a research fellow. Jack Lemann was already a member of the B.U. faculty. That year, Jack and "E.J." carried out, under the direction of Dr. Relman, the now-classic studies that validated the measurement of acid balance. The years of collecting innumerable blood samples and samples of more "fragrant" body fluids from the study subjects lead to a friendship between Jack and E.J. that would last a lifetime. That research experience also imparted a "spin" and direction to the research by Jack Lemann that would never be lost. Working backwards from Jack's current publications, which in the main involve the study of the mechanisms of calcium urolithiasis, one observes clearly how his current work represents a logical (and copious) evolution of ideas emanating from those seminal studies of acid-base and calcium metabolism in the laboratory of Dr. Relman.

The events of 1961 not only determined the direction of Jack's future research, but also their geographical location. In 1963, Jack responded affirmatively to E.J. Lennon's invitation to "go west, young man" and join E.J., who had since returned to Milwaukee, to form a two-man Nephrology Division at Marquette.

The coming of Jack Lemann to Milwaukee was accompanied by considerable fanfare (E. J. was very good at fanfare and practically everything else that he did). E.J. touted Jack Lemann as an investigator, clinician, and teacher who would have a major effect on the Marquette University School of Medicine. Once again, E.J. was correct. However, it is doubtful that even E.J. realized the full extent of his correctness.

Jack Lemann was first introduced to the housestaff at Milwaukee County Hospital at the weekly endocrinology conference (nephrology was not yet of sufficient maturity to merit its own conference). E.J. emphasized Jack Lemann's Boston roots, which impressed strongly to each house officer that Jack was coming to us from the repository of almost all that was known in modern medicine! The housestaff were in awe. At that time, the typical house officer at Milwaukee County General Hospital attended grade school, high school, college, and medical school all within about a 20-mile radius of the hospital. Thus, to the housestaff, it was as though Jack Lemann was from outer space. His accent, which was a mixture of eastern, southern, and western influences reinforced this motion that Jack Lemann was totally "other."

Despite Jack Lemann's perceived "otherness," he rapidly became a favorite of the housestaff because of his energy, strong opinions, and research orientation. The latter characteristic, in particular, was quite foreign to Milwaukee County General Hospital where almost all of the clinical faculty were pure clinicians. The fact that Marquette now had two nephrologists—and two of considerable talent—meant that we now had a powerhouse nephrology program. Recall that many academic programs at that time did not even have one nephrologist. We now had two, and they were dynamite! Soon, they had publications in the Journal of Clinical Investigation, received NIH grants, were major users of an NIH Clinical Research Center, and in short, brought much needed respectability to the Marquette academic programs.

Jack Lemann's national reputation grew quickly. It seemed inevitable that he would soon leave for more fertile academic grounds. The inevitable occurred in 1968 when he accepted the position of Chief of Nephrology at Boston University. Jack held that position until 1970 when E.J. Lennon stepped aside as Chief of Nephrology at Marquette to become an Associate Dean. Jack Lemann was then offered the position of Chief of Nephrology at Milwaukee County Hospital. The timing was right. Jack accepted.

His return to what was now the Medical College of Wisconsin can be regarded as the start of the modern era of nephrology in this region. Over the next 24 years, the Nephrology Division of the Medical College of Wisconsin would grow from a mere two faculty—one secretary division to a nephrology program of international prominence known particularly for its work in acid-base metabolism, calcium metabolism, urolithiasis, and glomerulonephritis. Presently, the Nephrology Division consists of 11 faculty in integrated programs at the Milwaukee County Regional Medical Center, the Froedtert Hospital, and at the VA Medical Center. There have been over 30 nephrology trainees in as many years. Their influence is spread from coast to coast, with trainees playing major roles in both the private sector and in academic nephrology.

Jack Lemann's role in all of this can be readily measured in terms of numbers of publications, dollars of NIH grant support, chapters on urolithiasis in the leading textbooks of nephrology, and service on national committees. However, Jack's impact is best measured by the inspiration he has imparted to his colleagues, trainees, and patients, who have experienced Jack's passion and devotion to do his very best. His best is more than we deserve. We salute you, Jack Lemann!

Lee A. Hebert
Ohio State University College of Medicine
Columbus, Ohio