

UK Hosts Key VZVRF Meetings

London was the setting in April 2002 for the sixth meeting of the VZV Research Foundation's European Working Group on Varicella Vaccination (*EuroVar*) and the inaugural gathering of the Foundation's United Kingdom Scientific Group.

EuroVar

EuroVar is an initiative created by the Foundation in 1999 to foster discussion among leading European scientists concerning the feasibility and desirability of a universal vaccination program against varicella. It is chaired by Bernard Rentier, Ph.D., D.Sc., professor of Virology and head of the Fundamental Virology Unit at the University of Liège in Belgium. Since its inception, funding for *EuroVar* has been provided through an unrestricted, educational grant from GlaxoSmithKline (Belgium).



On April 17, 2002, nearly 20 European scientists from eleven countries met to continue the dialogue on vaccination, and to hear presentations by such speakers as:

- Dr. Jane Seward, of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Dr. Anne A. Gershon, of Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons, who discussed the impact of the U.S. varicella vaccination program, which has led to a decline in the incidence of chickenpox and in hospitalizations due to chickenpox-related complications;

- Dr. Fabien Schumacher, of the University of Brescia, who reviewed the varicella vaccine strategy in Italy; and,
- Dr. Michael Gershon, of Columbia University, who presented data disputing the alleged link between MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine and autism.

Following the formal program, the *EuroVar* group began outlining a scientific paper detailing the growing consensus among members concerning the need for varicella vaccination. Upon completion, the paper will be submitted for publication to a major, scientific journal.

On April 18, the *EuroVar* group joined nearly one hundred British scientists and clinicians in a special workshop at The Royal College of Physicians. The workshop was opened by VZVRF

Chairman Richard T. Perkin, who discussed the international scope of the Foundation's work. Attendees then heard and participated in twelve presentations and panel discussions, led by infectious diseases experts, including:

- Dr. Norman Noah, of the UK's PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, who discussed the clinical, social and economic impact of chickenpox in England and Wales, based on data collected from 36 primary care practices and hospitals; and,



Dr. Judy Breuer (United Kingdom), delegate to UK Scientific Meeting, and Dr. Bernard Rentier (Belgium), *EuroVar* Chairman



EuroVar Group Members, (left to right): Dr. Jacques Senterre (Belgium) and Dr. Peter Wutzler (Germany)

The VZV Research Foundation (VZVRF), a publicly-supported charity, is the world's only nonprofit organization solely fostering research and education on the varicella-zoster virus (VZV) and the diseases it causes—chickenpox, shingles and post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN).

UK Hosts VZV Meetings

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- Dr. David Carrington, of the Bristol (UK) Public Health Laboratory, who presented data concerning the management of chickenpox in pregnancy, and the impact of varicella on the fetus and newborn.

The seventh *EuroVar* meeting and workshop has been scheduled for November 2002 in Warsaw, Poland.

UK Scientific Group

On April 17, following the *EuroVar* meeting, Dr. Robert Johnson, of the University of Bristol and chairman of the VZVRF/UK Subcommittee, led a meeting of nearly 20 leading British experts on VZV.

The discussion centered on a proposed parallel study of chickenpox and shingles in the United Kingdom.

Specifically, the study would track VZV infections among a population of approximately one million, unvaccinated subjects over an eighteen-month period. Incidence, management, complications and health-care economics would be observed, and an evaluation would be conducted of predictors of post-herpetic neuralgia. Meeting participants included two of the proposed study's principal investigators, Dr. Judy Breuer, of St. Barts and the London Hospitals Medical School, and Dr. Mike McKendrick, of Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield.

The Foundation is working to secure funding for this major epidemiological study. However, funding for a smaller, pilot study of shingles and PHN has been generously provided through an independent medical grant from Pfizer Inc.



*Dr. Robert W. Johnson,
UK Subcommittee
Chairman*

Message from the Chairman



Richard T. Perkin

Dear Friends,

I always look forward to writing this letter because it provides me with the opportunity to bring you up-to-date on the work you have so generously supported over the years. We especially appreciate your support as we begin our second decade as a leader in the global fight against infections caused by the varicella-zoster virus.

Now in our eleventh year, we have remained steadfast to our core mission: to foster research and education. In fact, this year, we have expanded our research mandate by securing funding for a pilot study of the epidemiology of shingles and PHN in a region of Britain. We are immensely grateful to Pfizer Inc. for its support of this pilot study, which is being led by Dr. Robert Johnson of the University of Bristol. We are hopeful this study will be a prelude to a planned, extensive epidemiological survey of VZV infections, including chickenpox, which will study one million British residents. Should this major study proceed, it will have tremendous implications, not only for the United Kingdom, but also for all of Europe.

Creating opportunities for scientific collaboration continues to be a central component in our programming. Our cover story details the most recent meeting in London of the European Working Group on Varicella Vaccination, or *EuroVar*. *EuroVar* is comprised of European scientists who meet to exchange research and opinions on whether or not to recommend chickenpox vaccination throughout the continent. Present at our London meeting and workshop were more than one hundred VZV experts from the U.S., Belgium, Sweden, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The *EuroVar* roundtables have been especially effective in spreading the word of the American success story with the vaccine. As always, we are thankful to GlaxoSmithKline, whose financial support has made this initiative a reality.

In the area of education, we have several projects underway that are directed at healthcare professionals. They include: our first "Medical Grand Rounds" workshop on VZV infections for hospital-based physicians, which we will combine with a public health forum; an updated reference for physicians on the diagnosis and treatment of shingles and PHN; and publication of the proceedings of the "Fifth International Conference on Varicella, Herpes Zoster and Post-Herpetic Neuralgia." Separately, we are working to secure funding for our first publication on shingles and PHN directed at the Hispanic community.

As you can see, our commitment to the fight against VZV goes on, as it must, since we are the only organization solely concerned with individuals afflicted with VZV infections. I hope you will sustain your commitment to our work by continuing your generous support.

Sincerely,



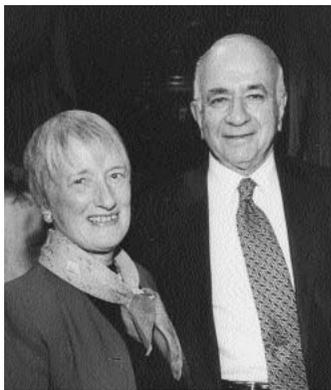
Richard T. Perkin

VZVRF Fellows, Supporters Honored

The Union Club of New York was the setting on May 15, 2002 for a luncheon honoring the two winners of the VZV Research Foundation's Fifth International Fellowship Competition—Dr. Helmut Fickenscher and Dr. Lucie Maresova—and the 2001-2003 Fellowship Program Supporters.

Leslie Perkin hosted the gathering of nearly 60 Foundation supporters and friends on behalf of her husband, VZVRF Chairman Richard T. Perkin, who was unable to attend due to a brief illness. In her remarks, Mrs. Perkin paid tribute to the foundations whose support had made the fifth competition possible. They are the: F.M. Kirby Foundation; Charles Henry Leach II Foundation; Mellen Foundation; The Reed Foundation; Adolph & Ruth Schnurmacher Foundation and The Starr Foundation.

Following Mrs. Perkin's comments, Dr. Anne A. Gershon, chair of the Foundation's Scientific Advisory Board, discussed the importance of VZVRF's \$1.25 million commitment to research. Brief presentations on the two, selected studies were then made by the Fellows, beginning with Dr. Fickenscher, of Ruprecht-Karls-Universität in Heidelberg, Germany. His study seeks to define the neuropathic functions of a



VZVRF Board Member James S. Marcus and SAB Chair Anne A. Gershon, M.D.



Pictured (left to right): VZVRF Fellow Lucie Maresova, Ph.D., Robert S. Perkin and VZVRF Fellow Helmut Fickenscher, Dr. med. habil.

human varicella zoster wildtype virus isolate using bacterial chromosomal techniques. He is investigating the mechanisms by which the varicella-zoster virus induces pain during and after its reactivation, when clinical zoster is observed.

Dr. Maresova, of the University of Iowa, described her study involving the investigation of the four VZV proteins that are the potential major fusogens of VZV. She is working to define a more quantitative test for VZV induced fusion in the infected cell. Dr. Maresova is hopeful her study will provide insight into the mechanism by which VZV can travel from one cell to another cell without ever entering the extracellular space.

The final speaker was Dr. Charles Grose, of the University of Iowa. Dr. Grose, who is Dr. Maresova's mentor, discussed the future potential of VZV research, including the Shingles Prevention Study, which is attempting to determine whether vaccination with a stronger dosage of the chickenpox vaccine will prevent or lessen the severity of shingles.

This luncheon was made possible by the VZVRF Board of Directors, six of whom were present, including: Mortimer Berkowitz III, David J. Braga, Louis R. Gary, John H. Manice, James S. Marcus and Irving Sitnick.

VZVRF Publishes PHN Booklet

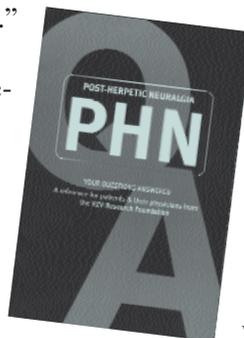
Who can get PHN? What does it feel like? Can PHN cause depression? Can it be prevented?

The answers to these and other key questions related to post-herpetic neuralgia are featured in a booklet recently published by the VZV Research Foundation. However, the key area addressed in *PHN: Your Questions Answered* concerns treatment for PHN.

"The main area of inquiry among VZV sufferers who contact us, or attend our public forums, is how to relieve the pain of PHN," said VZVRF Chairman Richard T. Perkin. "Since the Foundation is not licensed to practice medicine, we turned to the experts,

whose guidance enabled us to produce a concise, up-to-date primer for both patients and their physicians."

The summary of treatments and their relative effectiveness is based on a paper published in the May 2000 edition of the journal *Drugs*, entitled, "Treatment of Postherpetic Neuralgia: An Update." Dr. Ghassan E. Kanazi, Dr. Robert W. Johnson and Dr. Robert H. Dworkin authored the paper. Dr. Johnson, of the University of Bristol, and Dr. Dworkin, of the University of Rochester School of



Medicine and Dentistry, served as reviewers of the Foundation's booklet, as did Dr. Kathleen M. Foley, of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and Dr. Kenneth Schmader, of Duke University Medical Center.

"While this booklet is an important reference, we must emphasize that one's physician, who is most familiar with an individual's case of PHN, will be able to determine which of the cited or alternate treatments can best relieve an individual's PHN-related pain," said Mr. Perkin.

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at www.vzvfoundation.org**

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VZV Research Foundation
40 East 72nd Street
New York, NY 10021 USA
Tel: 212-472-3181
Fax: 212-861-7033
E-mail: vzv@vzvfoundation.org
1-800-472-VIRUS (1-800-472-8478)
www.vzvfoundation.org

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Neuropathic Pain Conference Set for November

VZVRF Chairman Richard T. Perkin has announced the Foundation will be a sponsor of the “Fifth International Conference on the Mechanisms and Treatment of Neuropathic Pain,” to be held November 21–23, 2002 in Bermuda. The University of Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry is coordinating the conference, under the chairmanship of Robert H. Dworkin, Ph.D., professor of Anesthesiology, Neurology, Oncology and Psychiatry at Rochester.

“Our primary goal will be to review the current knowledge of the mechanisms and treatments of neuropathic pain and prospects for the future,” said Dr. Dworkin. “Recent research has led to an increased understanding of the pathophysiology of neuropathic pain, and this information has important implications for treatment that are not yet widely appreciated.”

The conference will feature presentations on pain mechanisms and syn-

dromes, including “pain and the brain” and painful versus painless neuropathy. There will also be an extensive exploration of treatments, covering antidepressant, anticonvulsant, topical and opioid analgesics, in addition to intrathecal therapies and spinal cord stimulation. The development of new drugs for neuropathic pain will be reviewed through talks on clinical trials of investigational analgesics and analgesic combinations.

As part of its sponsorship, the Foundation will underwrite a workshop entitled, “How academia, the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration and industry might collaborate.”



Dr. Robert H. Dworkin

JOINING THE FIGHT AGAINST VZV INFECTIONS

The VZV Research Foundation (VZVRF), a publicly-supported charity, must rely on your contributions to continue its fight against the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). All gifts are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by law.

YOUR ANNUAL GIFT OF:

\$25.00 or more will entitle you to receive the VZVRF newsletter, *VZV Focus*.

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Thank you for your generosity.

Dramatic Decline in Varicella Following Vaccination

Three-Community Study Reported in JAMA

An active surveillance study of three communities has found a very significant decrease in cases of varicella (chickenpox) as a result of vaccination. The study was reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on February 6, 2002. It was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with state and local health departments, in: Antelope Valley, California; Travis County, Texas and West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The study was launched in 1995 because data was not available to monitor the impact of varicella vaccination, according to Jane F. Seward, MBBS, MPH. Dr. Seward is Acting Chief, Child Vaccine Preventable Diseases Branch, of the CDC's National Immunization Program, and the study's lead author. Currently, varicella is not a nationally

reportable disease and, therefore, is not monitored through the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System.

The ongoing study examined population-based, surveillance data from January 1, 1995 through December 31, 2000, to, first, establish baseline data and, second, to monitor trends in varicella following introduction of the vaccine. Reporting sites in each community included: child care centers; schools; universities; physicians; public health clinics; hospitals; emergency departments and households.

From 1995 through 2000, in Antelope Valley, Travis County and



Dr. Jane F. Seward

West Philadelphia, varicella cases declined 71, 84 and 79 percent, respectively. Cases declined in all age groups, including infants and adults, but the declines were greatest among children aged one to four years. Hospitalizations due to varicella also declined significantly. By 2000, vaccine coverage among children aged 19 to 35 months was 82.1, 73.6 and 83.8 percent in Los Angeles County, Texas and Philadelphia, respectively,

which the study termed "moderate vaccine coverage."

The study concluded "continued implementation of existing vaccine policies should lead to further reductions of varicella disease in these communities and throughout the United States."

Chickenpox Vaccine Supplies Now Adequate

A nearly yearlong shortage of American-made vaccines appears to be ending, with two, notable exceptions. The shortage had disrupted the normal schedule of inoculations for several, preventable childhood diseases.

In an August 12, 2002 update to its website—www.cdc.gov/nip—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted there were now sufficient supplies of seven of nine vaccines. These include the: varicella vaccine, which protects against chickenpox; MMR vaccine, which prevents against measles, mumps and rubella; and DTP vaccine, which targets diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, or "whooping cough."

However, according to the CDC, there are still shortages of: pneumococcal (PCV) vaccine, which protects against seven strains of the bacterium

Streptococcus pneumoniae; and haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib) vaccine.

On its website, the CDC states the reasons for the shortages "include companies leaving the vaccine market, manufacturing or production problems and insufficient stockpiles," due to a greater-than-expected demand for the vaccines.

In April 2002, Dr. Walter A. Orenstein, director of the CDC's National Immunization Program, was quoted in *The Washington Post* as characterizing the shortages as "...the worst I can remember. I have never seen anything like the supply problems with this many vaccines in the 24 years I've worked in immunization." He was later quoted by *The New York Times* as stating that possible ways to avoid future vaccine shortages include "better stock-

piles, a national authority to oversee vaccine development and financial incentives for pharmaceutical companies to stay in the market, like tax breaks or higher prices."

To date, there have been no significant outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, in part because America's children have strong residual immunity from high immunization rates in recent years. In addition, the CDC has also been rationing supplies and changing immunization schedules to ensure all children receive at least some doses of every vaccine they need.

For updated information on the vaccine shortages, log on to the CDC's website, www.cdc.gov/nip, or contact the CDC Immunization Hotline at 1-800-232-2522 (English) or 1-800-232-0233 (Spanish).

VZVRF FELLOWSHIP LUNCHEON



Pictured (left to right): VZVRF Board Members James S. Marcus, David J. Braga and John H. Manice



(Above) Dr. Timothy Hsu, Medical Director, Neurology Group, Pfizer Inc., and Dr. Anne Gershon, VZVRF Scientific Advisory Board Chair



Dr. Charles F. Grose, University of Iowa

VZV

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