

# UT News

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\*\*\*\*Raymond and Ellen Willie Chair  
in Molecular Neuropharmacology

DALLAS -- The University of Texas System Board of Regents accepted the gift of a \$500,000 endowment for establishment of the Raymond and Ellen Willie Chair in Molecular Neuropharmacology at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas at its regular February meeting. Following the establishment of the Willie Chair, the UT regents named Dr. Alfred G. Gilman, chairman of the Department of Pharmacology at that institution, as its first holder.

Raymond Willie Jr. and his wife Ellen established the perpetual endowment to encourage and assist ongoing research into the molecular mechanisms of pain perception. He is president and chief executive officer of Willow Distributors, Inc.

Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UTHSCD, said, "The Willies' gift represents the best kind of commitment to research. They realize the need for knowledge of basic nerve functions to gain understanding of what produces pain. Their vision in giving a gift of this sort will enable the basic science investigators to search for clues to gain this understanding."

The businessman said that he and Mrs. Willie established the Willie Chair in honor of Dr. Harold Crasilneck, well-known Dallas psychologist and pioneer in the use of medical hypnotherapy and longtime friend of his. Willie, who is interested in research related to pain, stated that Crasilneck's name should always be associated with the Willie Chair.

Gilman is best known for his work on the molecular mechanism of hormone action at the level of the cell membranes. The scientist said that this research is "immensely important for our understanding of the communication between cells."

The neuropharmacologist said the work supported by the Willie Chair will help him and his associates continue basic scientific studies into pain and other perceptions involving sensory proteins.

"If we are able to take a longer view with more basic research into pain, we are more likely to attain results. We need to understand how sensory information gets processed, how it gets understood at the cellular level. Over the past several years we've studied how information that's encoded in various ways gets from the outside of the cell to the inside and how it gets translated from a chemical on the outside of the cell to some sort of response inside the cell," he explained.

In the context of pain, Dr. Gilman cited the example of putting your hand on a hot stove. "You jump away. Of course, that's more complicated than a single-cell response, but that whole-body response is the conglomerate of what lots of cells are doing. We are trying to break this all down and understand it at the most fundamental level."

(more)

Using cultured mouse lymphocytes, Gilman and his associates are studying the outside plasma membrane of the cells. The transduction of information from outside to the inside of the cell is called transmembrane signaling.

The research being done by Gilman and his associates that will be furthered by the Willie gift is expected to have applications in many clinical treatment areas in the future. A real hope for a new drug might come from the identification of chemical signals in their chain reaction and synthesizing "blockers" for those signals. But that is way down the line, said the scientist.

"First we must appreciate both the similarities and the differences of these communication pathways and then learn to manipulate the differences," he said.

A summa cum laude graduate of Yale with a major in biochemistry, Dr. Gilman received his M.D. degree from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and his Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University in pharmacology in 1969. After graduating from the joint M.D./Ph.D. program, he began his career as a pharmacology research associate at the National Institutes of Health. There he worked in the laboratory of biochemical genetics at the National Heart and Lung Institute.

Before he came to the health science center in 1981, Dr. Gilman had been on faculty at the University of Virginia School of Medicine at Charlottesville. He became director of their Medical Scientist Training Program in 1978 and was granted membership in the Center for Advanced Studies at that institution the next year.

Dr. Gilman was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1985. The academy, composed of distinguished scientists and engineers, is considered the nation's top scientific advisory group and serves as official advisory body to the federal government.

Crasilneck, in whose honor the Willie Chair was established, has been in private practice in Dallas since 1961 and has served as clinical professor with both the department of anesthesiology and psychiatry at UTHSCD since 1970. After receiving his bachelor of arts degree from Trinity University, Crasilneck was awarded a master of arts from The University of Texas in 1948. He went on to receive a doctorate in psychology from the University of Houston in 1954.

He was the first intern in clinical psychology at UT Southwestern Medical School in 1953-54 and stayed on to join its faculty where he was assistant professor of psychiatry until 1960.

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Distribution: AA,AB,AC,AM,SC,SL

NOTE: The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the School of Allied Health Sciences.