CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

HANS C. OETTGEN

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

on

21 and 22 January 2004

Hans C. Oettgen

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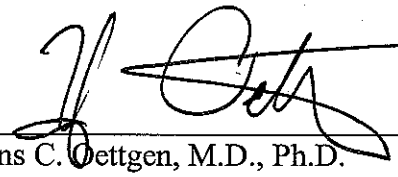

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HANS C. OETTGEN

1958	Born in Cologne, Germany, on 23 January

Education

1980	B.A., Williams College
1987	MD/PhD, Immunology, Harvard Medical School

Professional Experience

Children's Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts

1987-1990	Resident in Pediatrics
1990-1994	Clinical Immunology Fellow

Harvard Medical School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

1987-1993	Clinical Fellow in Pediatrics
1994-1995	Instructor in Pediatrics
1995-present	Assistant Professor in Pediatrics

Honors

1979	Phi Beta Kappa, Williams College
1980	Sigma Xi, Williams College
1980	Highest Honors in Chemistry, Williams College
1987	Shipley Prize for Research, Harvard Medical School
1991	Janeway Research Scholarship, Children's Hospital, Boston, MA
1995	Allergy Research Award, Pharmacia Allergy Research Foundation
1995	Education and Research Trust Award, American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
1996	Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant

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The last authors contributed equally to this publication. The work was carried out by my fellow, Dr. Mehlhop. Dr. Martin and I alternated last authorship through our collaboration (see ref. 14)

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ABSTRACT

Hans C. Oettgen was born in Cologne, Germany, spent some time in Nairobi, Kenya, but was raised mostly in New Canaan, Connecticut, the eldest of three children. His mother was a teacher; his father was a researcher in immunology and a physician in internal medicine who, eventually, worked at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. Oettgen enjoyed school, especially math, reading, and spending time outdoors. His family often went camping in the Adirondacks and spent summers traveling by train and/or by boat throughout Europe. He had a chemistry set though his interest in math led him more towards computer programming than performing experiments. He spent time in his father's lab during his childhood, but in high school he worked in some of his father's colleagues labs, mostly doing technical work without understanding the fundamental scientific questions being investigated, until he had the chance to do research involving the isolation of a particular protein from peanuts, called peanut lectin, which binds to a sugar structure and is expressed on some cancer malignancies. He was also in the Boy Scouts of America, was (and is) an avid photographer, and knew that he wanted a broad liberal arts education even though he intended to pursue science or medicine as a career.

Oettgen matriculated at Williams College, majoring in chemistry, but ultimately choosing to attend medical school. He began his medical studies at the Harvard Medical School; the summer after his first year, though, gave him the chance to work with Cornelius P. Terhorst at the Dana-Farber Cancer Center conducting research on B lymphocytes, using protein chemistry to describe B-1 and B-2. While at Harvard he decided to move into the MD/PhD program and continued to work with Terhorst, writing his thesis on the biochemical characterization of T-cell-receptor structure. After completing his residency in 1990, Oettgen was slotted to undertake a postdoctoral fellowship with David Baltimore at the Whitehead Institute, but Baltimore's move to Rockefeller University in New York City prompted Oettgen to do his fellowship with Philip Leder in genetics. As a postdoc he developed a mouse without the gene for immunoglobulin E (IgE). He then accepted a position at Children's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, researching the role of IgE in immune function.

At the end of the interview Oettgen talks about the process of writing journal articles; balancing family and career; his leisure activities; the source of his ideas; and the impact of technology on his work. He concludes the interview with a discussion of competition and collaboration in science; the grant-writing process; the role of the scientist in educating the public about science; the impact of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences on his work; his children; and the benefits of having a clinical practice and doing basic science.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

William Van Benschoten, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., History, University of California, Riverside; M.A., History, University of California, Riverside; C. Phil., History, UCLA

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Oettgen's office, Harvard University.

Dates, length of sessions: January 21, 2004 and January 22, 2004

Total number of recorded hours: 4.0

Persons present during interview: Oettgen and Van Benschoten.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series with Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences conducted by the UCLA Oral History Program in conjunction with the Pew Charitable Trusts's Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Oral History and Archives Project. The project has been designed to document the backgrounds, education, and research of biomedical scientists awarded four-year Pew scholarships since 1988.

To provide an overall framework for project interviews, the director of the UCLA Oral History Program and three UCLA faculty project consultants developed a topic outline. In preparing for this interview, Van Benschoten held a telephone preinterview conversation with Oettgen to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed documentation in Oettgen's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including Oettgen's proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Carol Squires edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Oettgen reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Carol Squires prepared the table of contents and TechniType Transcripts compiled the guide to proper names.

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