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William H. Beierwaltes: Pioneer in Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging

To honor William H. Beierwaltes’ pioneering work and many contributions to the field of nuclear medicine, the Department of Radiology has embarked on a campaign to establish the William H. Beierwaltes Endowment of Nuclear Medicine in Radiology.

A Leader in Development of Thyroid Cancer Therapy with Radioiodine

- Dr. Beierwaltes was a pioneer in the use of radioiodine (131-I) for thyroid disease.
- He was among the first to use radioiodine for the diagnosis and treatment of thyroid cancer and became a national authority for this technique.
- The treatment of thyroid cancer with 131-I was widely adopted following the 1957 publication of “Clinical Use of Radioisotopes” the first book on clinical nuclear medicine practice, co-authored by Dr. Beierwaltes.
- 131-I therapy has stood the test of time for over 50 years and remains the standard of care worldwide.

A Founder of Molecular Imaging

- The radiopharmaceuticals developed under Dr. Beierwaltes’ leadership are among the first molecular imaging agents to visualize biologic processes at the cellular and subcellular levels.
- His success in grant funding led to a variety of projects, facilities and infrastructure that fueled the rapid advancement of nuclear medicine research at the University of Michigan. A National Institutes of Health grant provided the initial funding for U-M’s PET center and medical cyclotron.
- Dr. Beierwaltes was a prolific author of a large number of important publications. He wrote or coauthored more than 300 scientific papers, 4 books, and 77 book chapters.

A Visionary in Functional Adrenal Imaging

Dr. Beierwaltes was the driving force behind the development of two unique radiopharmaceuticals for adrenal imaging:

- Instrumental in the development of 123-I radiocholesterol and NP-59 for functional imaging of the adrenal cortex.
- Co-inventor of meta-iodobenzylguanidine (MIBG), a guanethidine analog, for imaging of adrenomedullary tumors.
- These radiopharmaceuticals radically transformed the diagnostic approaches to adrenal and extra-adrenal diseases such as pheochromocytoma, neuroblastoma and the differentiation of adrenal cortical lesions.
- Through molecular imaging with 131-I and 123-I MIBG, Dr. Beierwaltes paved the way to PET imaging using receptor-binding agents.

A Dedicated Educator

- Dr. Beierwaltes organized one of the first university programs for nuclear medicine training.
- He mentored hundreds of physicians and physicists in training and inspired many to pursue careers in nuclear medicine through his teaching skills, boundless enthusiasm and the close personal interest he took in “his” students.
- He is remembered as an outstanding and dedicated educator of clinicians and innovative investigators.

‘It is difficult to place into words the charisma that leaders like Dr. Beierwaltes have for inspiring young people to follow their example.” — Thomas P. Haynie, MD

MOLECULAR IMAGING RESEARCH: The University of Michigan Tradition

An endowment that builds upon Dr. Beierwaltes’ exceptional career in nuclear medicine at the University of Michigan Hospital and Health Systems will be an enduring legacy that will enable important future advances in the field. Through this endowment we recognize and honor Dr. Beierwaltes’ exceptional service to patients, trainees and the profession.

The Endowment will establish an annual lectureship in Dr. Beierwaltes’ name to attract outstanding teachers and leaders in the field as speakers. The Endowment will also provide ongoing support to faculty members, allowing them to focus on expanding clinical, educational, and research programs in Nuclear Medicine.

To learn how you can honor the contributions of Dr. Beierwaltes, please contact Alisha Faciane at (734) 232-3248 or at affenty@umich.edu.

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