1998-07-21

MedCenter Extra: July 21, 1998

Corporate Communications, Boston University Medical Center

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/22648

Boston University
Dr. Feldman stepping aside as chair of Department of Neurology

Dr. Robert G. Feldman has announced that he will step aside as chairman of the Department of Neurology at BUMC on Jan. 1, 1999, after completing 30 very successful years in that position. After a successor has been found to replace Dr. Feldman, he will serve as Chairman Emeritus and will continue to have an active role in teaching, research and clinical care in the institution and will work on the expansion of neuroscience programs at the medical center.

Dr. Feldman will focus on his work in clinical pharmacology as professor of neurology and pharmacology and as leader of the Parkinson’s Disease program at BU. In addition, as professor of environmental health at SPH, he plans to increase his research activities in the area of occupational and environmental neurotoxicology as it relates to the etiology of neurodegenerative diseases.

At the time of his appointment in 1969, Dr. Feldman, at 35 years of age, was one of the youngest persons in the country to hold a major post of professor and departmental chairman of Neurology. Feldman has been the neurologist-in-chief at the former University Hospital, BMC, and at The Boston Veterans Administration Medical Center. Prior to coming to BU, Dr. Feldman held faculty appointments at Harvard Medical School (in the Neurological Unit of Boston City Hospital) and at the Yale Medical School. He obtained his medical degree from the University of Cincinnati, interned at Los Angeles County Hospital, trained in neurology at Yale-New Haven Medical Center, and had post-residency training at the Montreal Neurological Institute and the Mayo Clinic.

Dr. Feldman’s major scientific and clinical contributions have been in the areas of movement disorders and other neurodegenerative diseases, as well as in the field of applied neurotoxicology. His sentinel paper on Familial Alzheimer’s disease written in the 1960s led the way to further research in the genetics of Alzheimer’s disease and the eventual location of the gene for early onset Alzheimer’s disease on chromosome 14. With his associates, a Neurogenetics section has been created within the department, and similar studies about the inheritance of Parkinson’s disease are ongoing. He served for 10 years as the clinical director of Occupational Health at the University Hospital, was a member of the Board of Scientific Advisors of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, and founded the Occupational and Environmental Neurology Program at BU.

During his tenure as chairman of the Department of Neurology, Dr. Feldman oversaw the development of prestigious faculty who have made very significant contributions in all the various subspecialties of Neurology, including the Aphasia Research Center, Memory Disorders Center, The BU Stroke Programs and the Framingham Heart and Stroke Studies, Huntington Disease program, Sleep Disorders program, the Alzheimer’s Center, continued on back
and the program in Neurorehabilitation. With the help of grateful patients and other benefactors, Dr. Feldman created several research and patient care areas in the medical center, including the Ellen and Harold Wald Parkinson’s Disease Inpatient Unit, the Abramson Neurorehabilitation room, the Carol Turnbull Motor Control Laboratory, the John and Doris Nichols Molecular Neurogenetics Lab area and others.

“Dr. Feldman has made numerous contributions to this medical center over the past three decades,” said Elaine Ullian, president and chief executive officer of BMC. “We are grateful that he will remain active in the department so that patients may continue to benefit from his expertise.”

As a teacher, Dr. Feldman has focused on preparing students, residents and other physicians not only to have a strong knowledge base in Neurology, but also to care for their patients with empathy and humanism. In promoting this message, Dr. Feldman and his wife, Gail, established the Dr. Robert G. Feldman Prize, which is given each year to one or two selected graduates who have demonstrated these qualities in their interactions with patients with neurological illnesses. Dr. Feldman brought the notion and the financial support to BU as one of the first schools in the country to establish the tradition of the White Coat Ceremony to initiate the entering medical student class, through his own former teacher and humanist, Dr. Arnold P. Gold, of the Arnold Gold Foundation. He has received numerous teaching awards and honors, including the highest award for excellence in teaching given by BUSM — the Stanley L. Robbins Award — and the highest teaching honor from BU — the Arthur Metcalf Award.

“Dr. Feldman is a wonderful teacher and has been recognized for teaching excellence throughout his career. Many fine neurologists have benefited from his teaching expertise, and we are appreciative that he will continue educating future physicians. We are thankful for his many contributions to the Neurology Department and BU Medical Center,” said Aram Chobanian, MD, dean of BUSM and provost of BU Medical Campus.

Dr. Feldman has held executive positions in all the major neurological organizations, including the American Neurological Association, American Academy of Neurology, Association of University Professors of Neurology, and the Association of Veterans Administration Neurologists.

Dr. Feldman has published more than 200 articles and book chapters, has edited three books and has single-authored his recent textbook, Occupational and Environmental Eurotoxicology.

In announcing his decision, Dr. Feldman said, “I am proud of the dedication and commitment of the members of my faculty who have worked with me over the years at Boston University to make ours one of the strongest academic and clinical departments of Neurology in the world.

“It is gratifying to me to see how many of our graduates are making important contributions daily to the care of patients with neurological illnesses and others who are doing outstanding neuroscientific research to meet the challenges of unanswered questions these patients pose. It pleases me to see how well my students have done in their careers. The department, the school and the hospitals are very different than I found them when I arrived here 30 years ago. I trust that my successor will build upon the strengths I leave and will meet the new challenges of health care delivery within an academic medical center, such as Boston Medical Center and at Boston University School of Medicine.”

Dean Chobanian and Elaine Ullian will convene a search committee to begin the process of identifying a new chairman of Neurology.