

WHO'S WHO at ATS

GREGORY WAGNER: MINING HIS POLICY INTERESTS

Gregory Wagner, M.D., took a Harvard College seminar in the late 1960s that included various case studies, one of which dealt with the development of medical clinics in Appalachian mining communities. He recalls it being “fascinating” because it made him aware of the health challenges that mine workers face and the barriers to providing them medical care.

The experience helped set Dr. Wagner on a career path in occupational health and instilled in him a deep interest in public policy geared to preventing diseases and conditions, rather than solely diagnosing and treating them.

In late July, Dr. Wagner moved into what he called the “intense, enormously engaging and tremendously exciting” position of deputy assistant secretary for policy in the U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA).

The MSHA position is “an opportunity to engage in the issues in which I’ve been interested for years—specifically, preventing lung diseases in miners,” explained Dr. Wagner, who remains an adjunct professor at Harvard’s School of Public Health.

His specialization was influenced foremost, he said, by the era in which he entered the field: the passage in 1969 of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, and in 1970 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act; news reports of mine workers’ contract negotiations and strikes; and public discussion of occupational and health risks in the mines.

“It’s hard to separate anyone, including me, from their historical context,” Dr. Wagner said. “It really was a time of change.” Over the years, he has been most focused on occupational conditions affecting the lungs. He started his career treating patients at the Cabin Creek Health Association in Dawes, West Virginia, where he served as medical director, medical consultant on the chronic respiratory disease treatment program, co-director of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-sponsored occupational health project and liaison officer to both the National Health Service Corps and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

During his tenure in West Virginia, “it was clear to me that people could have significant impairment” even without having coal workers pneumoconiosis (CWP), Dr. Wagner said. The experience there “helped develop my interest in lung disease prevention,” rather than in diagnosing, treating and compensating dust’s effects alone.

Dr. Wagner worked for NIOSH for 20 years: 15 years as director of its division of respiratory disease studies in West Virginia, five years as a senior advisor to its national director, and 18 months as the NIOSH’s first acting associate director for mining.

Rather than categorize himself narrowly according to his research, academic and governmental experiences, Dr.



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Wagner prefers the catch-all “public policy person” to mean “the wide range of opportunities to try to understand both the determinants of diseases and the process of intervention to reduce risk.” “I spend time trying to understand governmental and non-governmental intervention to reduce risk,” he said. Particularly fulfilling, he added, has been working with the International Labor Organization and the World Health Organization on preventing silicosis, asbestosis and other pneumoconioses.

Since joining the ATS in 1989, he has chaired the Ethics and Conflict of Interest Committee and has helped the ATS develop policy statements and guidelines on non-malignant asbestos diseases, the health effects of air pollution, respiratory health hazards in agriculture and adverse impact of crystalline silica exposure. He recently co-wrote a paper on the ATS’s approach to conflict-of-interest management.

“I am particularly impressed with the broad impact of Society statements and their ability to influence public health policy,” he said. “The ATS provides opportunities to learn, be in touch with colleagues and help shape the direction of our field.”

“My career has been an odd combination [of] clinical work that’s been important and fulfilling, teaching, research focused epidemiologically and public policy engagement through the ATS and elsewhere,” he continued. “Now, I have the tremendous opportunity and honor of running a regulatory agency responsible for assuring the health and safety of the nation’s miners.”

Dr. Wagner enjoys such outdoor activities as hiking, biking, sailing and fly-fishing. His wife, Emily Spieler, is dean of Northeastern University’s School of Law. They have two children: Jennifer, a public-interest lawyer; and Daniel, a journalist. ■

Research Program

Apply for the ATS Tobacco Dependence Research Fund Grants:

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 1, 2010

- 1. ATS Tobacco-Dependence Research Fund Grant** (one grant available)
 - Made possible by a generous educational grant from the ATS Foundation Tobacco-Dependence Research Fund.
- 2. ATS/ALA of Hawaii Research Grant—International Research Project US-Asia** (one grant available)
 - Made possible by a generous educational grant from the ALA of Hawaii and the ATS Foundation Tobacco-Dependence Research Fund.
- 3. ATS/ALA of Hawaii Research Grant—Open to all Geographic Areas** (one grant available)
 - Made possible by a generous educational grant from the ALA of Hawaii and the ATS Foundation Tobacco-Dependence Research Fund.

The tobacco-dependence grants are in the amount of \$100,000 (two years at \$50,000) and will be targeted to research in basic science, genetics, neurogenetics, pharmacology, neuropharmacology and clinical intervention and treatment in the area of tobacco dependence. Preference will be given to projects that, because of their novelty, require bridge funding before becoming competitive for other funding mechanisms.

A primary goal of the ATS Research Program is to enable new faculty-level investigators to make the transition to careers as established investigators. Partnerships between junior and senior investigators are strongly encouraged, particularly for new investigators who are within one to five years of completing their training. Both U.S. and non-U.S. based investigators are encouraged to apply. For more information, please visit the ATS Web site at www.thoracic.org.

**Please note that additional funding opportunities will be announced as they become available.*

NEWS BRIEF

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS RENEW FOR LESS

ATS membership has been restructured, and international members can now renew their membership for less—however, starting January 1, 2010, they will no longer receive print editions of the Society’s three journals by mail. All content from the journals will continue to be available online through www.thoracic.org at no additional cost, but members who prefer to continue receiving print copies must order them for an additional \$75 per journal.

For more information on the restructuring—which will result in larger discounts on International Conference registration and lower abstract submission fees for members, reduced fees for other ATS educational programs and products, and lower page fees for publishing in the Society’s journals—please visit www.thoracic.org/sections/membership/categories-and-fees.html.