



In a Remarkably Short Time, Vallerie McLaughlin, MD, Joins a Select Group of Investigators Blazing a Trail in PH Research



Vallerie V. McLaughlin, MD

The career path of Vallerie V. McLaughlin, MD, appeared clearly headed toward her choice of echocardiography until opportunity knocked on her office door in the form of Stuart Rich, MD, one of the country's foremost experts on pulmonary hypertension (PH). Dr Rich offered her the chance to work with him on the PH service at the University of Illinois Hospital and Clinics in Chicago. Fresh from a cardiology fellowship at Northwestern

University and from advanced training and research in echocardiography, Dr McLaughlin recognized the compelling opportunity to work with PH patients at a critical juncture in their care, soon after the emergence of prostacyclin treatment.

Accepting the offer, Dr McLaughlin embarked on a remarkable journey, first under the tutelage of Dr Rich and in the last 10 years during which she has been an integral part of every pivotal trial in PH as the spectrum of therapy grew significantly. Those first PH patients, however, provided the initial momentum for her commitment to the field. "They came to us so short of breath and we were able to help them with epoprostenol. It was a rewarding opportunity to make them better." As an Associate Professor of Medicine at Rush Medical College, Chicago, Dr McLaughlin then became Associate Director, Rush Heart Institute Center of Pulmonary Heart Disease.

"Everyone comes to a time when they need to take off on their own and it was time for me to venture out," she recalled, citing her next opportunity to become director of the pulmonary hypertension program at the University of Michigan. The program at Michigan has become one of the leading PH centers in the country. The author or co-author of more than 60 peer-reviewed articles, Dr McLaughlin is now the Principal Investigator of the Data Coordinating Center and Chairperson of the Steering Committee for the Pulmonary Hypertension Breakthrough Initiative, supported by The Cardiovascular Medical Research and Education Fund (CMREF). The CMREF mission is the support of research to uncover the etiology and pathogenesis of idiopathic pulmonary arterial hypertension (IPAH, or PPH), in pursuit of the ultimate goal of its treatment and cure.

The Initiative procures the lungs of patients with PH who are undergoing a lung transplant, processes them, and distributes them for scientific study, according to Dr McLaughlin. "We hope that by getting diseased lungs into researchers' hands we can make a real breakthrough in this disease. The main research interest of this project is basic science—including the pathology, proteomics, and genomics of PH. We have a center that is culturing endothelial, smooth muscle, and adventitial cells so we can do in vitro work with actual cells from PH patients."

Continuing her commitment to the programs of the Pulmonary Hypertension Association, Dr McLaughlin last year became the chair of PHA's Scientific Leadership Council. Helping to coordinate PHA's educational initiatives and multi-industry support, she oversees a broad range of initiatives such as the 30-city tour of educational programs, a preceptorship program, an online component offering different educational tracks for specialists and generalists and various regional events for patients and physicians.

Despite her leadership position as Principal Investigator on numerous trials and her role in spearheading other research and educational activities, Dr McLaughlin is quick to offer her appreciation to colleagues who she says have served her so well as mentors and role models. Comments from some of these colleagues are among the following tributes offered to Dr McLaughlin.

"Val is a highly dedicated PH physician and investigator. She is clearly loved by her patients, and she's highly respected by her colleagues in the field. I don't know quite how she does it all – she travels extensively, and yet is somehow able to serve as the director of a highly successful PH program at the University of Michigan, lead an effort to develop a comprehensive consensus statement for the American College of Cardiology, help to coordinate the PAH Breakthrough Initiative, serve as Chair of the Scientific Leadership Council for the PHA, and be a mom. There simply are not enough hours in the day to do this, and I happen to know that Val works through much of the night and on weekends as well – having received emails sent at some very early morning hours, and throughout the weekend. We are all very fortunate to have such a highly talented, hardworking, and dedicated colleague."

—**David Badesch, MD**

"Val McLaughlin's dedication to advancing research in pulmonary hypertension, educating others in the field, and her incredible energy and drive have been an inspiration to many, including me. The numerous, widely quoted papers bearing her name as first author testify to her importance in the field of clinical research in pulmonary hypertension. Although she is chronologically my junior, she has, in fact been a valued mentor!"

—**Richard Channick, MD**

"I first got to know Vallerie during the 2nd WHO PPH Sym-

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posium in Evian in 1998. It took no time whatsoever to know she had what it takes to become a top leader in the PH field. In addition to being bright, she was, and still is, incredibly compassionate, a critical thinker who does not take the written word as carte blanche but at the same time is truly modest regarding her significant contributions to the field. She knows how to ask questions, and question what may be considered "accepted" with grace. I have had the great pleasure to watch her grow and flourish. And although she has an enormous amount on her plate at one time, she never neglects any commitment she makes; and yet, she maintains the equipoise to know how important her children and family are to her, and she to them. I am not saying that what Vallerie has been able to accomplish is easy but I am certain that she has done it not for the accolades from others but because she is truly passionate about her career as she is about her family; and with her passion, she is able to make it work!!"—Robyn Barst, MD

"Dr McLaughlin is a true leader in the field of pulmonary hypertension. She is involved in many of the important projects ongoing in this area and her commitment to the PHA is unwavering. I have had the opportunity to work with Val during my tenure on the SLC of the PHA and have always been impressed by her ability to quickly identify the key elements of any perceived problem or plan and at her skill at providing potential solutions and improvements. Her prominence in the field is evidenced by her authorship on many of the important papers and position statements that have been recently published and her skill as a physician is highlighted by the respect of her peers and the testimony of her patients. Personally, she has been an important mentor in my career and I am very happy to see her receive this well deserved recognition. The interesting thing is she is just now hitting her stride so we will continue to see great contributions from Val for years to come."—Todd Bull, MD ■