



American Society for Investigative Pathology
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Gold-Headed Cane Award – 2002 Joe W. Grisham, M.D.



Dr. Joe Wheeler Grisham, Chair Emeritus of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is the winner of the 2002 Gold-Headed Cane, ASIP's highest honor. In addition to more than 150 published papers and landmark research into liver pathology, Dr. Grisham is noted for his 26-year chairmanship of the UNC-Chapel Hill Pathology Department, for his mentoring of dozens of today's leaders in the field, and for his public advocacy on behalf of pathology.

Dr. Grisham is credited with transforming his department into a national leader in education in pathology and laboratory medicine. He insisted on originality from his professors, always keeping the curriculum fresh. He encouraged and participated in their research, often eschewing credit. And he peppered the courses with lectures of his own. Once, when one of his professors, Dr. David H. Walker, was departing to become Pathology Chair at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Dr. Walker asked for Dr. Grisham's top-ten pointers for doing the job. He answered, "There's only one. Put the effort to develop your faculty members' careers above all else."

Still, Dr. Grisham made some significant contributions of his own, particularly in the areas of hepatic biology. He co-authored landmark studies in liver regeneration and the study of stem cells. He coined the universally used term "facultative stem cells." His analyses of commonly accepted markers of malignancy contributed to the important insight that malignant transformation does not necessarily follow a single path. Subsequently, he found that the transfer of a part of human chromosome 11 could suppress the malignant behavior of certain malignant clones. His laboratory has mapped the region of the suppressor gene to a small part of the transferred chromosomal fragment.

You have to look back nearly 40 years to find the beginning of Dr. Grisham's contributions to pathology. Early in his career, he authored two seminal studies. One defined the timing and progressive zonal localization of DNA synthesis during regeneration of the rat liver. Another identified the role of the hepatic oval cell as a stem cell for hepatocytes following hepatic injuries. Later, Dr. Grisham achieved the long-term culture of epithelial cells from liver tissue. Those cells were extensively cloned and studied, leading to breakthroughs that narrowed the search for a tumor suppressor gene on human chromosome 11. This work has also had an impact on the understanding of malignant transformation and its relationship to age.

In addition to his research, teaching and administrative accomplishments, Dr. Grisham found time to be a leader of, and public advocate, for pathology. He served as President of the American Association of Pathologists (currently the ASIP), as special reviewer of the Extramural Research and Training Division of NIH, and as President of FASEB. He spent four years each as chair of Pathology Study Section A and B at NIH, and has chaired numerous Advisory Panels and Research Committees. From 1987-1991 Dr. Grisham chaired the FASEB Public Affairs Committee, where he advocated public awareness of, and education in, pathology, and worked to increase appreciation in Congress for the importance of pathological research.

Nominating Dr. Grisham for the Gold-Headed Cane, Dr. David G. Kaufman, Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at UNC, says his work "represents an outstanding record of accomplishment that has had a profound influence on the study of hepatic cell biology and hepatic carcinogenesis." Dr. Kaufman calls Dr. Grisham "one of the outstanding scientific figures in the field."

A Tennessee native, Dr. Grisham received his BA (1953, Chemistry, Cum Laude) and his MD (1957) from Vanderbilt University.

The Gold-Headed Cane Award is given in recognition of long-term contributions to pathology. Dr. Grisham will receive a mahogany cane topped with a 14 karat gold head and engraved band.