



Cardiovascular and Renal Progression Factors  
in Chronic Kidney Disease:  
A Colloquium in Honor of John H. Dirks  
ISN World Congress of Nephrology  
Singapore, June 26, 2005

**INTRODUCTION**

This Colloquium is being held in honor of Dr. John Herbert Dirks. Table 1 summarizes John's illustrious ed-

ucational and academic career but I will leave the details to Dr. Robert Schrier, who will introduce John again as the recipient of the first International Society of Nephrology (ISN) Roscoe R. Robinson Award. Instead, I will briefly focus on some of the primary elements that characterize the life of this gifted and

Table 1. John Herbert Dirks, M.D.

1933	Born, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
1953	Graduated, University of Manitoba
1958	M.D. University of Manitoba
1957–1962	Medical Residency, Internal Medicine, Montreal
1962–1965	Fellow, Laboratory of Kidney and Electrolyte Metabolism, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD
1965–1976	Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor of Medicine and Physiology, McGill University, Montreal; Director, Renal and Electrolyte Division, Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal
1976–1987	Chair, Department of Medicine, University of British Columbia, Vancouver
1987–1991	Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto
1992–1994	Chair, National Council of Canada for Bioethics in Human Research
1994–1996	Rector, The Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan
1994–Present	Chair, International Society of Nephrology (ISN) Commission for the Global Advancement of Nephrology (COMGAN)
1992–Present	President, The Gairdner Foundation

most giving Canadian physician, scientist, scholar, and humanitarian.

Born and raised in modesty in the true Mennonite tradition, which he has steadfastly maintained throughout his life, John's career has been marked by genuine and consistent curiosity, bookishness, commitment to excellence, and a grand vision of worldly scope. After training in internal medicine in Montreal, he spent 3 productive years in renal physiology research at National Institutes of Health (NIH) where he made key discoveries on fluid volume regulation. When he returned to Montreal to lead the Renal Program at Royal Victoria Hospital, he and his team made major contributions to our understanding of the mechanism of action of diuretics and the role of the renal tubule in calcium, phosphorus, and magnesium homeostasis. John then was invited to the Chair in Medicine at the University of British Columbia where, over the next 11 years, he built a superb department with distinctions in teaching and research. His leadership skills led to his elevation to the Deanship of the University of Toronto where he again served with great distinction, before embarking on a new career in international health, initially in Toronto and then at Aga Khan University in Pakistan. He similarly raised the standards, energy level, and international reputation of the once rather sleepy Gairdner Foundation to a position of preeminence since assuming its Presidency more than a decade ago. Indeed, under his leadership, it is now the case that a person selected for the Gairdner Award is virtually certain to be awarded the Nobel Prize. Likewise, his superb leadership of the global outreach effort of the ISN through its Commission for the Global Advancement of Nephrology (COMGAN) has made it a truly path-breaking vehicle for promoting educational and practical training experiences for tens of thousands of renal and related health care professionals in virtually every corner of the globe.

Among many other initiatives forged by COMGAN under his guidance, his efforts have made clear to international health agencies that we are now experiencing a sea-change in the world's disease burden, namely, no longer primarily from infectious diseases but rather from chronic, progressive, and debilitating disorders such

as heart failure and chronic renal failure. For his humane and selfless acts, John has received the highest recognition and praise from his professional colleagues and deserves no less from this Society to which he has given so much. In all the spheres cited above, progress and forward momentum would never have been possible without his unbridled enthusiasm, diligence, and self-sacrifice—qualities of citizenship and devotion to fulfilling humankind's greatest needs that set him apart as a national and international treasure deserving of the highest forms of recognition. John, more than anyone I know, embodies Ralph Waldo Emerson's admonition, "Do not go where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

One such modest recognition is the convening of today's scientific session in his honor. The theme selected, "Cardiovascular and Renal Progression Factors in Chronic Kidney Disease," reflects John's keen interest in global disease prevention, particularly the global diseases such as cardiovascular and renal disease that now account for much of the world's morbidity and mortality and for which beneficial intervention strategies are urgently needed. To address these issues we have assembled an outstanding roster of speakers, whose contributions and expertise are forging the primary and secondary prevention initiatives that are rapidly setting standards for care around the world. In the papers that follow, these initiatives will be highlighted. Let me also take this occasion to recognize the generous and unrestricted educational grant from Amgen, Inc., that makes this colloquium and publication possible.

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