



Stanford eCorner

Don Francis's Mission - Kids and Kids' Health

Dr. Don Francis, *Vaxgen*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/896/Don-Francis-Mission-Kids-and-Kids-Health>

Don Francis, a pioneer in the field of HIV/AIDS research, had a long history as a pediatrician and an employee of the CDC before he joined Genentech to develop an AIDS vaccine. He realized that the only way to truly combat AIDS was to develop a vaccine. He chose Genentech because it was the world leader on vaccines at that time, but he became disappointed when the development was not going anywhere and decided to start his own company.



Transcript

I come from a long line of California physicians. Raised in the Bay Area. My grandfather actually immigrated from the UK as a physician and my mother and father were also physicians. And the unique thing about me and this family, I actually have one brother. And my mother, father, and brother are undergraduate and graduate school of Stanford. However, I went to Berkeley. I just wanted you all to know that. As the bio says, I'm a pediatrician and always say 'devoted' pediatrician. So my challenge generally has been towards kids and kids' health. And what you could do especially in tropical disease.

I started very early on. Right out of medical school, I took a fellowship in India, came back, and started working for the CDC for 21 years. For those of you who are involved in the current conflicts in the world, the reason I went to CDC was the Public Health Services draft referable. And all the physicians were being drafted at that time and I was moving to Canada and head of Infectious Diseases of LA County Hospital said, "Why don't you go to CDC for two years and you can do your military service?" I did that and stayed for 21 ultimately dealing with outbreaks all around the world. I have here just a few that we dealt with and then in the middle of my career in '81 comes AIDS and as Tom mentioned you get *And The Band Played On* and see the horror stories as it is unfolded. And I retired in 1992 recognizing the only way we're going to stop AIDS epidemic was to have a vaccine. And Genentech was the lead in the world at that time of working on vaccines. Started that process at Genentech, and then saw that Genentech wasn't going to go anywhere because it didn't compete in a business sense and I will get into that. And so, we thought we'd be so smart to find our own company. All I can mention, there was national AIDS vaccine and we first started a non-profit side.

I worked for the group to start but ultimately became international AIDS vaccine initiative in New York which is one of the leaders in making AIDS vaccine for the not for profit over the years. But I thought I could do better in the for profit and we did very well over the last decade or more at Genentech and at VaxGen. But you see, we've had really not very good results for development of the vaccines. It's going to require a lot more money and a lot more time and it's just not going to be done in the private sector. And so, now we're developing the new not for profit.