

ATVB Named Lecture Reviews—Insight Into Author

ATVB Named Lecture Reviews—Russell Ross Memorial Lectureship in Vascular Biology

Insight Into the Author: Christopher K. Glass, MD, PhD, UC San Diego School of Medicine



Why did you choose the profession of scientific investigation?

Sometime during my Junior year at the University of California, Berkeley, I settled on the idea of pursuing clinical medicine as a profession. To get a better feeling for the role of science in medicine, I started working in Alex Nichols's lab in the Donner laboratory. This was where John Goffman had used the analytical ultracentrifuge to characterize low- and high-density lipoproteins and their relationship to heart disease. I found experimental work challenging and exciting and spent a lot of time in the lab. After my first year of medical school at the University of California, San Diego, I spent the summer working in John Kane's laboratory in the Cardiovascular Research Institute at UC San Francisco. In addition to virtually daily contact with John, I got to know many other great scientists at the CVRI, including Dick Havel, who was the director at the time. I didn't accomplish much of significance in the lab despite my best efforts, but was so completely taken over by the idea of being a physician scientist that I applied for and was accepted into the Medical Scientist Training Program when I returned to UC San Diego in the fall. I have pretty much been on that track ever since.

Who have been your role model(s) in your scientific and professional life?

My PhD thesis advisor, Dan Steinberg, has been a central role model throughout my professional life and is the person who taught me that mentoring doesn't stop when trainees leave the lab. John Kane and Joe Witztum were also great role models in the field of atherosclerosis research. Michael (Geoff) Rosenfeld, my post doc advisor and the person who trained me as a molecular biologist, has also been a lifelong role model for how to creatively approach important and challenging problems. Siamon Gordon was a great role model for how to study macrophage biology. There are many others.

If you were not a scientist, which profession would you pick?

A swim coach. I started at Cal on a partial swimming scholarship. After two years it became pretty clear that I wasn't as good a swimmer as I hoped I would be, and I wasn't getting a good return on the investment of a lot of time in the pool. I traded that in for the time in Alex Nichols's lab and a more serious approach to my coursework. Had I been a better swimmer and competed for the full four years, it is unlikely that I would have made my way to medical school and much more likely into coaching. I think I would have enjoyed the mentoring and scientific aspects of coaching a lot and still think about it as a volunteer activity down the road.

Which direction do you envisage your science taking?

I come in to the laboratory every morning with the idea that the best papers from my lab have yet to be written. Right now we are planning to apply genomic approaches to understand macrophage development and function in vivo. We hope to learn about how macrophages participate in both normal tissue homeostasis and pathological forms of inflammation in diseases ranging from atherosclerosis to neurodegenerative diseases.

What are your nonscientific activities?

Keeping up with our four kids (now grown). I still like to swim and am in the pool or the ocean most mornings before work. I greatly enjoy eating my wife's cooking, and we like traveling together to new places. I don't watch much TV.

What are your favorite foods and are they heart healthy?

I like lots of different foods that span the spectrum of today's view of what is and is not heart healthy. Having taught nutrition at one point to medical students, I came to realize that this is a moving target. I am interested in the compositions of foods beyond their content of essential sources of calories, building blocks, and vitamins. For example, there is a vast array of small molecules present in plants that have biological activities, but for most, we have very little understanding of their effects on tissue homeostasis and function. My goal is to adjust relative proportions of various foods to try to achieve a "high-performance diet." Right now I am experimenting with fruit/vegetable juice extracts supplemented with chia seeds as a preworkout tonic.

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