This special addition to the fall 2008 issue of Foundation Focus represents the full-length article referenced on page 10 of the issue.

Dr. David Grob recognized by Foundation
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Comments on the early history of MGFA, Dr. David Grob in the 1950s, and Dr. Grob in 2008

This year, the MGFA bestowed upon Dr. David Grob the honor of Founder’s Award. Along with Dr. Henry Viets, Dr. Grob was one of the original founding members of the Medical/Scientific Advisory Board and MGFA. For those unfamiliar with Dr. Grob and his impact on MG and on MGFA, the following comments seem appropriate.

The seeds for the formation of MGFA occurred in 1952 as the vision of Jane Ellsworth, whose daughter had been diagnosed with MG. The planning group for MGFA was formed in early 1952 with the following mission: “Fostering, coordinating, and supporting research into the cause, prevention, alleviation, and cure of MG.” At a meeting in New York City in December 1952, the group planned for the organization of the “Medical Board” and the executive director “decided to advise the physicians… that every doctor who is interested in MG should be elected…” to the Medical Advisory Board. Jane Ellsworth served as secretary and prepared all of the minutes for the early meetings.

MGFA became officially established in 1953. (See New York Times article clipping on the next page.)

Dr. Henry Rouse Viets was named the first MAB chairman by the early planners. He quickly identified the following group as a Medical Advisory Board interim executive committee, whose job was to formulate and establish the initial MAB:

- Houston Merritt, NYC
- Pearce Bailey, NIH
- Herbert Schwarz, Montreal
- David Grob, Hopkins

This group (including Dr. Grob) established the following line-up of original members in the early MAB:

- Augustus Rose, LA
- Lewis Goodman, Salt Lake
- Mabel Masten, Madison
- Thomas Farmer, Dallas
- Kermit Osserman, NY
- Stephen Kuffler, Baltimore
- Robert Schwab, Boston
- George Gammon, PA
- J Edward Tether, Indy
- Klaus Unna, Chicago
- AL Sahs, Iowa
- Walter Klingman, Charlottesville
- Francis Forster, DC
- William Fields, Houston
- Richard Sweet, Boston

The MAB, with the full support of MGFA, made as a priority the establishment of a series of International Symposia on MG and related disorders. The inaugural International Symposium was thus held December 8-9, 1954 at The Medical School at the University of Pennsylvania (with George Gammon serving as host). Presiding over the Symposium was Dr. Viets (Chair of the MAB), who articulated the goals of the session to be: “review current research, summarize current concepts of NMT, and discuss directions of future therapy,” with an emphasis on international collaboration.

The proceedings of the 1st International Symposium were published in The...
American Journal of Medicine (1955) and included 18 articles, 85 pages, and reviews of neuromuscular junction structure, neuromuscular transmission, pharmacology, EMG, thymus, pregnancy, endocrine, cholinesterase inhibitors, and myasthenic crisis. Contained within the summary of the symposium, Dr. Viets made the following points:

• “...mortality reduced to 10-15% by modern therapy”

• “Eaton’s (Mayo) analysis appears to confirm the benefit of thymectomy reported by the Boston group”

• “Skeptics like Grob are still unwilling to concede that thymectomy is any more than a continuing experiment”

So clinicians such as Dr. Grob were, in the early 1950s, appropriately questioning the scientific basis for performing thymectomy in the management of MG.

Dr. Grob managed patients with myasthenia for decades. I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of his former patients, and they all comment on his amazing medical knowledge and skill and his ability to provide patients with his undivided attention and convey compassion and caring as only the very best of us in the medical profession can provide.

Kindness, integrity, and professionalism are the words that come to mind when one thinks of David Grob and neurology. He worried about junior colleagues at his institutions, and they were always included in an effort to give them credit and visibility. Additionally, those at other institutions were the recipients of his acknowledgements and recommendations for promotion. I was amazed when he provided a letter on my behalf for promotion at Indiana University. I decided that I had to behave in a manner that would be consistent with his wonderful standards.

Dr. Grob’s impact on young neurologists was to emphasize the importance of scholarly patient care, with the patient never being subservient to the research. The patient and his or her wellbeing are paramount.

Dr. Grob was born in New York City in 1919. He finished high school at age 14 and graduated from the City College of New York at age 18. He graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1942 with his MD degree.

While on staff at the Johns Hopkins, Dr. Grob devoted much of his professional skill on the evaluation, management, and research of patients with myasthenia. From 1958 to 1989, Dr. Grob chaired the Department of Medicine at Maimonides and, from 1989 to 2006, he was medical director of the Maimonides Research Foundation.

Dr. Grob has made a huge and unique contribution to the overall understanding of the clinical manifestations of MG, the spectrum of clinical presentations, and the all-important natural history data. Dr. Grob presented and published a remarkable series of reports on the natural history of MG in several thousand patients. Some of the observations cover six decades.

Fittingly, Dr. Grob’s last publication was in Muscle and Nerve shortly before his death. It served to summarize six decades of observations on myasthenia gravis. I cannot think of a set of data that I have used more consistently in my day-to-day practice in dealing with MG patients as the collection of clinical and natural history data provided over the years by Dr. Grob.