In the words of Gary Doern, Ph.D., a colleague, collaborator, and friend, “Few people have made more significant and lasting contributions to the field of clinical microbiology than has Jim Jorgensen, not only as a dedicated practitioner but also as an extremely productive researcher, an uncommonly effective educator, a broad reaching author, and a lifelong advocate for the discipline.” Such sentiments are echoed by peers and mentees who have had the privilege to work with Dr. Jorgensen (Jim). What follows in this brief biography is an account of tremendous contributions to the National Committee for Clinical Laboratory Standards (NCCLS), Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and American Society for Microbiology (ASM) from a gentleman highly regarded by all for his professionalism, his scholarship, his friendship, and especially his mentorship of junior scientists.

James H. Jorgensen was born on 11 July 1946 in Dallas, TX, and he has been a resident of the state his entire life. An only child, he has been riding horses since the age of 3, a passion he shares with his wife of 37 years. Currently, they live on a 72-acre ranch (“small by Texas standards,” as Jim says) northwest of San Antonio. They have lived there for 35 years.

When he was not riding horses or herding cattle, Jim was studying. He received his baccalaureate degree in biology from the University of North Texas (formerly North Texas State University) in 1969 and 1 year later an M.S. in microbiology, supported by a predoctoral scholarship, from the same institution. He was a James W. McLaughlin predoctoral fellow in infection and immunity at the University of Texas Medical Branch, and after successfully defending his thesis, entitled “Preparation and Applications
of Limulus Lysate for In Vitro Endotoxin Assay,” he was awarded his Ph.D. in microbiology in 1973. Jim’s long and distinguished research career was foreshadowed by the receipt of numerous awards during graduate school, including the O. B. Williams Award for an outstanding research paper presented by a student, Mead Johnson Awards for excellence in research, and an award for excellence in research at the doctoral level presented by the Galveston, TX, chapter of the Society of the Sigma Xi.

After graduate school, Dr. Jorgensen began his illustrious career in microbiology as associate director of the clinical microbiology laboratory of Bexar County Hospital, San Antonio, TX, and an instructor in the Departments of Pathology and Microbiology of the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. In 1975, the same year that he became certified as a specialist microbiologist in public health and medical laboratory microbiology by the National Registry of Microbiologists, he also assumed directorship of the clinical microbiology laboratories of the university hospital, a position he held until 2013. Academically, he rose quickly to the position of professor in the Departments of Pathology, Medicine, Microbiology, and Clinical Laboratory Sciences, a rank he held for 30 years until his partial retirement in 2014. Currently, he is emeritus professor and research professor of pathology at the University of Texas Health Science Center.

In addition to service to his own institution, Dr. Jorgensen has participated in many national committees and held numerous offices in professional societies, and he has been an active tant for laboratories and industry alike. His major contributions will be highlighted here. When I think of the NCCLS/CLSI, the name Jim Jorgensen rises to the top of the list of its major contributors over the years. Jim’s commitment to the NCCLS began in 1986 as an advisor to the Subcommittee on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing (AST). Subsequently, he became the chairman of that subcommittee for 7 years (1990 to 1996). Several colleagues who have worked with Jim on the various NCCLS/CLSI subcommittees share their thoughts. Melvin Weinstein, M.D., writes, “My first memory of him is at the first CLSI (then NCCLS) AST subcommittee meeting I attended in June of either 1990 or 1991. Jim was the chair at the time, and I remember thinking that he had the patience of a saint. In what I came to learn was his typical gentle yet firm manner, he let the various players have their say and then directed the discussion and committee deliberations toward a reasonable conclusion.” Janet Hindler, M.S., echoes those sentiments in her remarks. “Jim always handled the discussions in his typical calm and deliberative manner and never lost sight of the need for good science to prevail in the decisions that were made. That same high level of professionalism has marked all his work over the ensuing years and has been the foundation of his many contributions to our field, particularly in the area of antimicrobial testing.” In addition to his work on the antimicrobial susceptibility testing subcommittee, Jim also served as the chair of the Area Committee on Microbiology for the CLSI from 1997 to 2002, as the vice chair from 2003 to 2007, and as an advisor from 2008 until 2012. He was the chair of the Working Group on Fastidious or Infrequently Isolated Bacteria from 2005 to 2011 and currently remains an important member of this group. Jean Patel writes, “He was responsible for developing data and rationale for some of the most important decisions that the subcommittee made, such as developing infection-specific breakpoints for Streptococcus pneumoniae.” His leadership skills, combined with his excellent research on Streptococcus pneumoniae and Haemophilus influenzae, among other pathogens, resulted in the well-received and long-awaited M45 CLSI document on susceptibility testing of fastidious bacteria.

Scientific knowledge and leadership skills aside, Jim’s other contribution to the CLSI was his foresight to urge and welcome participation on the various committees of the next generation of scientists. As Jean Patel, Ph.D., notes, “He had no problem transitioning from a leadership role to a supportive role.” Several colleagues, including Fred Tenover, Ph.D., Sandra Richter, M.D., Melvin Weinstein, M.D., Jean Patel, Ph.D., Matthew Moore, M.D., M.P.H., and Janet Hindler, M.S., comment upon how welcoming he was when they joined the committees and what a profound effect he has had upon their careers and the careers of others too numerous to mention here. Appropriately, Jim has been acknowledged by the CLSI through the receipt of two awards, the Russell J. Eilers Memorial Award for distinguished service (2001) and the John V. Bergen Award for his unique and significant contributions to advances in the organizational directives and objectives of the CLSI (2008).

Jim extended his amazing knowledge and research accomplishments abroad, where he served as the chair of the working group on antimicrobial susceptibility testing of infectious agents of the International Standardization Organization (ISO, Geneva, Switzerland) from 2003 to 2012. This working group defined global standards for susceptibility testing for bacteria and fungi. In addition, he was appointed as an observer by the European Committee for Standardization in Brussels, Belgium, on its CEN/TC 140 Working Group 10 for Standardization of Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing and Development of Performance Criteria for Susceptibility Testing Devices (2003 to 2010).

Jim has enjoyed his collaborative work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which began in 1995, and he believes that this collaboration was important to his career. He served as a member of the Drug-Resistant Streptococcus pneumoniae Therapeutic Working Group from 1996 to 1999, and from 1999 to 2012 he served on the Steering Committee for the Active Bacterial Core Surveillance of the Emerging Infectious Diseases Program, a multisite network that monitors bacteria causing meningitis and sepsis in the United States. Cynthia Whitney, M.D., M.P.H, comments “Jim’s lab generated antimicrobial susceptibility results for over 40,000 pneumococcal isolates collected through ABCs [active bacterial core surveillance], documenting the emergence of multidrug-resistant strains as well as the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine’s ability to drive them back. Because Jim always knew about the latest breakthroughs in the microbiology field, we are so grateful for the input he provided into the design of our system as well as on ways to ensure its quality.” These skills and Jim’s research on resistance of Streptococcus pneumoniae were crucial to the success of the work performed by the Respiratory Diseases Branch to understand the epidemiology of invasive infections caused by this pathogen and the publication of policies generated on public health interventions to prevent these infections. Two papers, published in 2003 and 2006, produced from these mutual collaborations and first-authored by Cynthia Whitney (1, 2), received the Charles C. Sheppard Science Award for the most outstanding peer-reviewed public health research paper in their respective years of publication. Matthew Moore, M.D., M.P.H., and Cynthia Whitney, M.D., M.P.H., both echo the sentiments summarized by others above regarding Jim’s unwavering support of them though they were early in their careers. Dr. Moore
likewise had the opportunity to observe Jim’s phenomenal interpersonal skills, teamwork, optimism, and professionalism when he served on a CLSI working group in 2007.

As emphasized above, Jim’s research has focused on antibiotic resistance mechanisms among various pathogens, including Streptococcus pneumoniae, staphylococci, enterococci, Enterobacteriaceae, Acinetobacter spp., and various fastidious bacteria. Jim has highly valued the opportunity to be a research mentor to many young scientists, specifically U.S. military infectious disease fellows. In total, he directed or supervised the research of more than two dozen trainees. His work has resulted in 237 peer-reviewed research publications, many of them on optimum susceptibility testing methods and testing of novel antimicrobial agents. He is a frequently invited speaker at national and international venues, where his scientific presentations are, in the words of Melvin Weinstein, “models of clarity.”

Remarkably, Jim has found the time to write numerous reviews and book chapters for many prestigious textbooks, including Automation in Clinical Microbiology, Textbook of Diagnostic Microbiology, and Manual of Clinical Microbiology (MCM). He has been a part of the editorial team of MCM from the 6th edition (MCM-6) through MCM-11, initially as section editor and most recently as co-editor in chief along with Mike Pfaller, M.D. Patrick Murray, Ph.D., recalls, “I have known Jim for 40 years and consider him a good friend and well-respected colleague. It was logical that he serve as the volume editor for the 8th, 9th, and 10th editions of the Manual of Clinical Microbiology, not just because he is THE expert on antibacterial agents and susceptibility tests but also because of his skill in working with a diverse collection of authors to create an informative, cohesive collection of chapters on very difficult subjects.” As one of the editors of volume I of MCM-11, I appreciated Jim’s insightful and timely comments. His critical review of the chapters led to an improved volume. Beyond MCM, Jim has served on the editorial boards or as a reviewer for some of the most prestigious infectious disease and clinical microbiology journals, such as Clinical Infectious Diseases, Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy, and Journal of Clinical Microbiology. On a personal note, early in my career, I was fortunate that Jim reviewed a manuscript that I had submitted on a new susceptibility testing method. Rather than simply reject the paper, he provided very clear instructions on how to correct some major issues that made the paper stronger and more acceptable for publication. It was a tremendous learning experience for a young author.

Beyond his research mentorship, Jim also contributed to the education of generations of medical students, dental students, graduate students, pathology residents, and infectious disease fellows through both formal classroom lectures and clinical teaching. The ripple effect of such superb teaching is beyond imagination, but one can assume that Jim’s clinical service and teaching have had a profound effect upon patient care both directly and through his mentees, many of whom have assumed their own leadership positions. Fred Tenover, Ph.D., reiterates this point nicely. “What I admire most about Jim was his dedication to helping young clinical microbiologists launch their careers, either through ASM recognition awards, inviting them to speak at regional meetings, or urging them to take an active role in CLSI. Jim was always one to give others credit.” Thus, it is appropriate and exciting that Dr. Jim Jorgensen, at the time of this writing, is about to receive one of the most prestigious awards bestowed by ASM, the 2015 bioMérieux Sonnenwirth Award for Leadership in Clinical Microbiology. On the trails ahead, we look forward to continued leadership from this remarkable gentleman scholar.

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