Editorial

The Role of Teamwork in IR Research

Charles E. Ray Jr., MD, PhD, FSIR¹¹ Department of Radiology, University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, Chicago, Illinois

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Over the past year and a half or so, I have had the pleasure of being involved with a research project that is focused on creating, diagnosing, and treating hepatic tumors in a pig model. My involvement in large animal research is a relatively new endeavor for me, as I swore off of basic science research after killing too many rats in grad school (even the stupid crickets with their enucleated eyes, courtesy of me thank you very much, still give me the guilts 30 years after undergrad). It has been a very enlightening project for many reasons—and most of them have nothing to do with science. Rather, I have had the privilege of watching first-hand the teamwork that is needed to push forward cutting-edge science, and in particular the willingness of each of the team members in selflessly filling their specific roles within the team structure. I thought I would introduce you to four of them. All are in the University of Illinois system in one capacity or another.

Laurie Rund, PhD, is the workhorse of the group (unlike many, she is a true horse lover and won't mind the comparison—I hope). Laurie works tirelessly on everything from benign activities such as setting up transfers of the pigs and setting up meetings between the researchers to helping with grant submissions, to performing the true basic science such as harvesting oncologic cells for transfer into the pig model itself. I must admit that I knew Laurie for over a year before I even realized she had a PhD; she is far too humble to disclose even that, much less admit to her vital role in the whole team.

Regina Schwind, BS, is the Associate Director for Administration at the University of Illinois Cancer Center. Regina is perhaps the most intriguing of the team members; somehow, in her mid-20s, she became the chief administrator for a Big Ten cancer center and continues to have the vision to push a cancer center forward through its research mission. Regina, who has a business degree, is a self-taught scientist who knows far more about immunology than I do (that's actually not that impressive) and likely knows as much about interventional radiology (IR) cancer interventions as well (*that* one ticks me off). Besides being able to identify appropriate or novel funding opportunities, she is the real bridge between

the scientists in the group and the IR physicians—the true translator in our translational team.

Ron Gaba, MD, is a colleague of mine who many of the readers know either personally or by reputation. Ron is on a trajectory like none I've ever seen; frankly, he is the single most productive and scientifically creative IR physician I know. Unlike many of us, who in our research endeavors are happy to just do more of the same, Ron has taught himself translational techniques to the point where he is now considered one of the—if not the—top translational researchers in IR (he has won the Journal of Vascular and Interventional Radiology annual award for basic research at least twice). Somehow, he has done this without much guidance from anyone but himself, and as far as I know has no formal training—everything has largely been self-taught.

The senior partner in this group is Larry Schook, PhD. Larry is the former Vice President of Research for the entire University of Illinois system (I don't know what the budget is for the research component for this >80,000 students system, but I'm guessing a boatload). Amazingly, at age—I don't know, 80 maybe—Larry decided to step down from his post and return to his research roots. The energy he brings to the enterprise is striking—it isn't at all uncommon, but a little bit annoying, to get email chains throughout the weekends or late into the night regarding this project or that. As well as being a terrific scientist (he is the creator of this pig model), he has proven to be a vital mentor to everyone on the team, not the least of whom is me. Perhaps the greatest example he has set for me revolves around collaboration. He has built a collaborative team including everybody from his home institution, to New York, to Denmark—and he doesn't give a damn who gets the credit as long as the science is advanced. He has done all of this willingly, humbly, and with a ridiculous amount of work.

Working on this project, even to a relatively minor degree, has taught me the value of teamwork, as it could only be learned from within. In fact, I have no doubt that I have been surrounded by collaborative efforts all around me in the various institutions in which I've worked. Most likely, I was too obsessed with my own endeavors—the ones for which I would receive the credit—that I didn't see all of

Address for correspondence
Charles E. Ray Jr., MD, PhD, FSIR,
Department of Radiology,
University of Illinois Hospital and
Health Sciences System, 1740 W.
Taylor St., Chicago, IL 60612
(e-mail: chrayer@uic.edu).

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the opportunities around me. It is really only through this team effort—and what a team it is, with everybody bringing something different to the table—that these advancements in our field can possibly be made.

With the demands on individuals in academic medicine only increasing with more pressure to make a specific number of relative value units or dollars, the necessity to change one's teaching style, and less time to do all of this, the time is ripe for changing the paradigm in the metrics that departments use for determining academic productivity.

Instead of striving to be primary or senior authors on less robust publications in lesser journals, should administrators (including me) start to look at the impact of research—which is distinctly different from the similarly named impact factors of journals—as well? It will be a difficult and likely slow change, but one that will be essential in creating more collaboration between IRs, departments, and institutions. Now is likely the time to change, and for me I have to look no further than my own research group to use as a template for this change.