



## Henry Welch, FDA, and the Origins of ICAAC

Henry Welch, whose Ph.D. was in bacteriology, joined the FDA in 1938. During World War II, he became director of the new Division of Penicillin Control and Immunology, which by 1951 became the Division of Antibiotics as other antimicrobial agents, including streptomycin, tetracycline, bacitracin, and chloramphenicol were developed. During that period, drug sponsors were not required to demonstrate efficacy to receive FDA approval for their antibiotics.

Welch was asked in 1950 to edit a new journal on antibiotics and its first issue appeared the next year. That journal, which became *Antibiotics and Chemotherapy*, included on its editorial board Howard Florey, Selman Waksman, and Alexander Fleming. That journal and others were published by the Washington Institute of Medicine until it went bankrupt, and then taken over by Félix Martí-Ibáñez, who joined Welch in forming the corporation, Medical Encyclopedia, Inc.

Martí-Ibáñez, born in Spain and trained as a psychiatrist, immigrated to the United States in 1939, served as medical director in charge of overseas sales for several pharmaceutical companies, was named head of the history of medicine department at New York Medical College, and was a busy promoter of various medical publications and meetings.

Welch and Martí-Ibáñez worked closely with pharmaceutical companies, allowing them to review editorials in their journals before publication. Articles and editorials that were favorable to a company's drug products were profitably sold as reprints to be distributed, along with advertising material, to physicians. The journals carried advertisements from drug companies, and Welch edited separate volumes on antibiotics, such as penicillin and tetracycline, in cooperation with the companies producing them despite complaints from contributing authors about commercialization of their work.

Welch disagreed with many medical experts over the value of commercially available, fixed-dose antibiotic

combinations, which in 1956 included 29 products with two antibiotics, 20 with three, 8 with four, and 4 with five agents. Antibiotic-vitamin combinations were also available. During that period, manufacturers encouraged the broad use of these products for treatment and prophylaxis of infectious diseases. In 1956, Welch strongly supported use of these antibiotic, claiming that "a third era of antibiotic therapy" had arrived. That "third era" phrase proved to be inserted by the advertising staff of Charles Pfizer and Co., who not only edited those remarks but also were preparing to launch "sigmamycin," which combined oleandomycin and tetracycline.

Leaders of academic medicine disagreed with this approach. A critical editorial in the 1957 *Archives of Internal Medicine* stated: "There are no data or experience which would justify the employment of any fixed combination of two antibiotics. . . It is our firm conviction that the promotion and sale of such combinations should be discouraged until and unless adequate data from controlled clinical investigation justifies this practice, and then only with respect to definite combinations for specific purposes"

When others raised the question of conflict of interest, the Secretary of HEW began investigating Welch. Later, Senate investigations disclosed that Welch received 7.5% of the advertising revenue in his publications along with 50% of all reprint sales—despite his reporting to FDA that he accepted only "honoraria" for his editorial work.

Welch, thoroughly discredited, was forced to resign from FDA. These events also convinced Congress that FDA needed the power to require evidence of efficacy as well as safety for drug approvals, to regulate drug advertising, to include accurate information about product side effects, and to prevent generic drugs from being marketed as breakthroughs simply by assigning them new names.

air traffic—one of several factors that led ASM to postpone ICAAC until mid-December, while retaining Chicago as the venue. Then in 2005, hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans days before ICAAC was to begin, leading ASM again to postpone the meeting to December but also to move it to Washington.

Despite such challenges, ICAAC has con-

vened every year since 1961, and enjoys strong support from microbiologists and other scientists working on infectious diseases and agents with which to combat those diseases. Based on its resilient history, ICAAC is likely to remain a major meeting for those who are studying or otherwise interested in antimicrobial agents and their use in treating infectious diseases.