



BOARD MEMBER INTROSPECTIVE Dr. Richard Kunin, M.D.

By Scott C. Tips

We have heard it before, maybe even hundreds of times. I know I have. It is Ralph Waldo Emerson's quote where he counsels, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." So I hesitate to even mention it here, it seems almost trite with so many quoting Emerson yet so few real trailblazers out there — except for one thing that I have learned, NHF Board of Governors member Richard Kunin, M.D. is an authentic trailblazer who merits the name.

A Trailblazer Par Excellence

Some of us count ourselves lucky if we are first in anything at all, but Dr. Kunin's list of firsts is anything but paltry. In 1964, *Time Magazine* featured him in its article "Head to Toe Hypnosis," as having the first neurophysiology approach to medical hypnosis, a basis for a more-scientific method of psychotherapy. In 1969, he originated "The Mental Tune-Up," a therapy based on linguistics and mood-training hypnosis. In 1972, *Prevention Magazine* wrote about Dr. Kunin in "He Cures Psychiatric Disorders with Nutrition," as the first person to combine computer diet, vitamin and mineral testing, and hypnotherapy — a prototype of holistic medicine. So, long before the word *holistic* was in use, Dr. Kunin had integrated hypnosis, behavior therapy, and orthomolecular medicine and psychiatry into a comprehensive model of general medical practice. Research into mineral metabolism led to his 1974 discovery that manganese treatment is successful in treating drug-induced tardive dyskinesia. This demonstration of a mineral therapy came at a time when most medical authorities were united against nutrition therapy.

In 1975, Dr. Kunin was the first person to discover that aspirin blocks the skin-flush response to niacin (Vitamin B3) flush and to suggest that the anti-schizophrenic action of niacin is related to prostaglandins. In 1976, he was the first to introduce an individualized diet method based upon mood and energy effects, the Ortho-carbohydrate Diet. This led him that same year to Co-found the Orthomolecular Medical Society, of which he was also president from 1979 to 1981.

Publication of his best-selling book *Mega-Nutrition* in 1980 launched the *Listen to Your Body Diet*,[™] a method of balancing dietary carbohydrate, fat, and protein according to one's individual needs. Both *Mega-Nutrition* and his other best seller, *Mega-Nutrition for Women* (1983), helped to define the role of orthomolecular nutrition in general medical practice.

In 1987, Dr. Kunin developed the first cure for autism due to Thalassemia Minor, which is a genetic disease dramatically helped by nutrition therapy. See President's Commission on Mental Retardation and Mental Illness (Washington, D.C., 1988). In 1988, he followed this up by being the first to identify the effect of DMAE on MAO, linking induced MAO to treatment benefits.

Then, in 1990, he achieved the first measurement of EPA (a long-chain omega-3 oil) in snake oil, substantiating its anti-inflammatory benefits from the anti-leukotriene B4 action of EPA. This was actually an historic first since it showed that snake oil is not quackery after all!

But the list of firsts continues. In 1993, Dr. Kunin was the first Interim President of the International Society for Orthomolecular Medicine (Toronto). The next year, he was the first to identify carnitine deficiency with myasthenia as being due to valproic acid and aspirin; and, while catching his breath, decided to found the Society for Orthomolecular-Health Medicine (OHM), a medical-education society and a memorial to Linus Pauling. These two organizations have paved the way for medical practice to begin to accept nutraceuticals on a par with pharmaceuticals. We are still at an early stage in this medical evolution however.

In 1996, Dr. Kunin was the first to measure fluoride in hair and to demonstrate hair levels of up to 20 parts per million in an outpatient population, providing further evidence of a major public-health problem. Three years later, in 1999, he was the first to develop and publicize the theory that linked autism to ischemia and apoptotic neurological damage triggered by nutrient deficiency, toxicity, and vaccine activation of coagulation. In 2000, he was among the first to treat pro-coagulant factors in general medical patients and identify those combinations that predispose individuals to degenerative disease.

In 2001, he was the first to propose that megavitamins work as anti-coagulants, not just as antioxidants with anti-inflammatory effects. That same year, Dr. Kunin was among the first to identify vitamin-K deficiency syndrome, including osteoporosis, periodontal disease, inflammatory bowel disease, pancreatic disease, carpal tunnel, osteoarthritis, temporal-mandibular joint (TMJ) disease, and as a common factor in delayed healing.

Most recently, in 2003, Dr. Kunin was the first to identify the most important epidemic of our time: the genetic epidemic. Alarmingly, he discovered the mutation rate in 150 consecutive patients to be unexpectedly high: MTHFR (folate reductase) over 90% mutated and Methionine synthase (MTR and MTRR) over 95% mutated!

With this amazing track record of his, we fully expect to see more firsts in the future coming from this star member of our Board who was just re-elected to a new term. Dr. Kunin truly exemplifies the Renaissance man.

With an Unusually Broad Background

Educated at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Kunin received his M.D. degree in 1955. Following psychiatric residency training at New York Hospital, Payne Whitney Clinic, which he completed in 1959, he served for two years in the United States Army Medical Corps with the 7th Division at the DMZ and the 121 Evac Hospital in Korea, and later at Valley Forge Army Hospital in Pennsylvania.

Awarded an NIH post-doctoral fellowship in neurophysiology at Stanford University Medical Center in 1962, Dr. Kunin's depth-electrode studies documented hippocampal theta rhythm changes in "animal hypnosis." Application of this research to human hypnosis led to his appointment as a consultant in behavior therapy at Stanford in the Department of Psychology. He was also appointed "lecturer in hypnosis" at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco. In 1970, he was elected president of the San Francisco Academy of Hypnosis (a professional education society).

In 1986, Dr. Kunin began a 12-year stint as a columnist for the *San Francisco New Fillmore*. His column, "Putting Nutrition First," was a big hit with its readers that gave them valid health information they could use.

All of this activity and achievement has taken place against a backdrop of life in San Francisco, California with his wife Matilda for the last 43 years. Of two sons, one survives and runs a thriving business. The other unfortunately died in a freak accident at a young age. This motivated Matilda, an amazingly productive and beautiful person, to establish the San Francisco Young Performers Theatre in his memory. To this day, it remains an important part of San Francisco arts with eight main stage plays and 120 performances annually. Matilda has also established a Theatre in Education project, funded by the Haas Foundation, which brings theatre and performance experience to pre-school and early primary school children. Her productive energy well complements that of Dr. Kunin.

And a Renaissance Medical Practice

Dr. Kunin practices a health-medicine strategy that puts nutrition and detoxification first in medical diagnosis and therapy, along with exercise and endocrine support for adaptive mechanisms that can cope with disease. These health-medicine factors open the door to life-long self-therapy, which is only possible with ongoing health education and reinforcement of personal habits, including diet and specific nutrient supplementation. Equally helpful is the quest for healing thoughts, beliefs, and practices, which are central to every true “health-oriented therapy.”

Mega dose vitamin therapies generate some controversy even now, but it is widely accepted that they are powerful antioxidants. For example, Vitamin C, Vitamin E, Vitamin B6, B12, folic acid, and many bioflavonoids — all are directly or indirectly antioxidant. Of equal importance, they are anticoagulants as well. In fact, megavitamins hold a key to blood flow; and blood flow is the key to cellular nutrition. Reduced blood flow can cause free radicals, inflammation, and cell death by apoptosis within four hours. Thus, ischemia can induce cells to self-destruct by apoptosis. This mechanism is painless and non-inflammatory but it can magnify tissue damage, aggravate illnesses, and accelerate the aging process.

Megavitamin therapies are also an answer to biochemical individuality, a term popularized by Dr. Roger Williams forty years ago. These days, with the advent of DNA testing, it has become evident that genetic mutation is far more common than previously thought. As mentioned previously, the frequency of mutations that he has found in his primary-care practice is more than 90 percent in genes that regulate the folic-acid enzyme, MTHFR, and the B12 enzyme, MTR. The response to treatment with mega doses of folic acid and methylcobalamin B12 has been most gratifying, quite literally bringing us a new frontier in medical history.

Public Advocacy

Active in several non-profit organizations, Dr. Kunin leaves no stones unturned. The Society for Orthomolecular Health Medicine, of which Dr. Kunin is an active member in addition to the NHF, is dedicated to providing educational programs for health professionals and the public about the scientific roots of health-medicine. It advocates a strategy of diagnosis and treatment that addresses genetic and nutrient factors to identify the personal needs of the individual patient and that then provides support for the adaptive mechanisms and for resistant symptoms that persist despite orthomolecular therapy. As Dr. Kunin has long said, “Science has given us the tools to provide better diagnosis of the physiological and biochemical needs of our individual patients and, thus, to restore nutrition and environmental factors to the center of medical thinking. Without such a strategy, it is likely that the advances of ‘alternative’ medicine will be suppressed and under-utilized for years to come.”

That is another reason why Dr. Kunin says that the NHF’s mission of health freedom is so very important. Among other things, accomplishing this mission helps to spread the word that the orthomolecular movement remains dedicated to the message of Linus Pauling: “The right molecules in the right amounts.” And it thereby helps bring together the consciousness of health professionals and all of humanity in support of natural healing, healing by physiological and “orthomolecular” methods.

