

SESSION 16
A PIONEER'S VIEW ON SELENIUM RESEARCH

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L.A.N. Flohé

Universidad de la República, Bioquímica, Montevideo, Uruguay

Working for more than 20 years in industrial and public research management, I had to convince myself that success in research can be planned. The pre-history and history of biochemical selenology, however, challenges my conviction. Most of the pioneers in the field were anything else than strategic planners. Rather they made use of a naïve, though well trained sensory system, in particular of a sensitive nose (1) and open eyes, they were risk takers ignoring all criteria of feasibility, they were prepared to consider unusual hypothesis far beyond main-stream thinking, and some of them followed up their seemingly crazy ideas with unbelievable persistence. Accordingly, the history of selenium biochemistry appears to be a series of unrelated observations, spin-offs of unrelated research areas, unpredicted events and serendipities (2). Certainly, some bright brains, which were skilled in collateral thinking, were required to compose the

present picture of selenium biochemistry from loose ends and isolated mosaic stones. The picture still is fragmentary, just a framework with many white spots, by no means an almost final painting waiting for completion by the brushes of technicians or students. Yet progress seems to be slowing down despite the revolutionary technological developments in recent years. Evidently, a new generation of researchers is needed to advance the field by amalgamating topical methodologies and strategies with the creativity and persistence of the pioneers.

References:

1. Follow Your Nose. The Stadtman Way: a Tale of two Biochemists at the NIH.
<http://history.nih.gov/exhibits/stadtman/nose.htm>.
2. Flohé, L. The labour pains of biochemical selenology: the history of selenoprotein biosynthesis. *Biochim Biophys Acta* 1790 (2009), 1389-403.