American Academy of Nutrition Herbalist Wins James Lind Scientific Achievement Award

Noted herbalist and author Roy Upton, director of American Academy of Nutrition's soon to be launched herbal medicine diploma programs (Spring 2005) was honored in September of 2004 at a ceremony where he and others in the field of nutrition and medicine were awarded the James Lind Scientific Achievement Award. Held in Big Sky, Montana, the event brought together more than 150 researchers in herbal and nutritional medicine, manufacturers, and political representatives. Its purpose was to acknowledge and reward the accomplishments of those whose works have contributed to the scientific advancement of natural medicine and are helping to reshape the very structure of American health care, with a focus on the prevention and treatment of disease and the promotion of health through herbal and nutritional medicine.

American Academy of Nutrition is proud to welcome Roy among its faculty. Following is a brief synopsis of his work as an herbalist.

Roy Upton is the executive director of the American Herbal Pharmacopoeia, a non-profit herbal medicine research foundation located in Scotts Valley, California and has authored several books including the Botanical Safety Handbook (CRC Press), two books, one on Echinacea the other on St. John's wort, within the herbal health series of Keats Publishing, and is the co-author and editor of the scientific monographs of the American Herbal Pharmacopoeia.

Roy first learned about the medicinal use of plants while living among various Native American people's. According to Upton, "The use of plants was just a part of life, it was not some counter culture idea or regarded as alternative medicine, it was just what was used, often alone and along side Western drugs." Roy's early wanderings also took him to the United States Virgin Islands where the use of botanicals medicinally was similarly an inherent part of the culture, and where Roy quickly became an expert in the use of local plants of St. Thomas. His quest for herbal knowledge led him to the study of traditional Chinese medicine in Santa Cruz, California where he entered into a formal 3-year clinical residency with renowned herbalist, acupuncturist, and author, Michael Tierra, which was accompanied by pre-medical studies and additional training at the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shanghai, China. More than 20 years later, Roy has risen as one of the most respected medical herbalists in the United States and lectures internationally on medical herbalism, quality control of herbal medicine, and regulatory affairs.

In addition to his work as an herbalist, over the years Roy has also been embroiled in medical politics, helping to lead the fight for freedom of choice in medicine and being instrumental in securing legislation that ensured access to herbal medicines and dietary supplements in general. According to Upton, "For almost 4 years I did nothing but lobby and stimulate grass root support nationwide opposing efforts by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to severely limit access to dietary supplements. The Washington politicos said we couldn't get a single piece of legislation passed in 7 years; we got two pieces of legislation passed in 3. On the Hill (Capitol Hill) they said it was the biggest outcry of public pressure for an issue since the Vietnam War." Despite these legislative victories the war continues.

In an attempt to become more proactive in building the foundation for herbal medicine as a respected field in the US, Roy turned his energies to the development of the American Herbal Pharmacopoeia, a non-profit educational and research foundation dedicated to the development of quality control standards for the manufacture of herbal medicines. A pharmacopoeia is an authoritative set of standards that can be used, in the case of herbal products, to ensure their identity, purity, and quality. The organization also critically reviews all of the available traditional and scientific data on the efficacy and safety of selected medicinal plants, to as stated by Upton, "separate wheat from marketing chaff…There is a lot known about plants, a lot unknown, and there is a significant amount of misinformation. Our role is to bring all of the information together, subject it to a critical review by experts in all medical disciplines, and provide a detailed synopsis of the findings so that health professionals and consumers can make educated choices about their herbal medicine options."

Once the plant has been thoroughly researched and the quality standards set, the findings are published as an individual "monograph" which represents the most complete and critically-reviewed work on the subject in the English language. In the 10 years since the founding of the organization, the monographs have been regarded internationally as among the most comprehensive in the world.

The Lind Scientific Achievement Award, founded and funded by a core group of health professionals, health research groups, and supplement manufacturers, honors the memory of British surgeon Dr. James Lind, who in 1747 conducted one of the earliest recorded controlled clinical trial of six different treatments for scurvy, which at the time was killing thousands every year. Lind subsequently, in 1753, wrote his seminal treatise on scurvy which helped put an end to this dreaded disease. Scurvy was often observed in seafarers out to sea for relatively long periods of time. It manifested as putrid gums, lesions, and severe lassitude, with weakness of the knees that would leave those afflicted bedridden, often ending in death. Lind found that the consumption of citrus fruits, specifically lemons and oranges, were most effective for reversing this disease, thus documenting into history the first medical report of a food-deficiency disease. Later, it was identified that vitamin C was the primary nutrient lacking that leads to the development of scurvy. Other recipients of this, the first year of the James Lind Scientific Achievement Award included noted oncologist and cancer researchers Charles Simone MD and Ralph Moss, authors and nutrition experts Bruce Ames, PhD, Richard Passwater, PhD, Durk Pearson and Sandy Shaw, Professor of Medicine, UCLA, David Heber, MD, and the former Congressman from Iowa Berkeley Bedell. Bedell was instrumental in the establishment of the Office of Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health.