

MOVERS

Glenn Morris, director, Emerging Pathogens Institute, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida



2005–07: Interim dean, University of Maryland (UM) School of Public Health, Baltimore, Maryland
2000–07: Chairman, Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, UM School of Medicine
1996–2000: Head, Division of Hospital Epidemiology, Department of Medicine, UM School of Medicine

As a child of missionary parents based in Bangkok, Thailand, Glenn Morris saw at first hand the waves of pandemic cholera that struck southeast Asia each summer. "That experience left me with the indelible sense of the drama and urgency of dealing with an emerging pathogen," he says.

Back in the United States for college, Morris got a bachelor's degree in both biology and history from Rice University in Houston, Texas. He then went on to take an MD at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, Louisiana. At Tulane, he also studied dengue virus while getting his master's in public health and tropical medicine.

Later, as an epidemic intelligence officer with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), he dealt with cholera outbreaks at refugee camps in Thailand. Upon his return to the United States, Morris completed his residency before beginning a fellowship — and what turned out to be a 25-year career — at the Center for Vaccine Development at the University of Maryland. Focusing on the molecular genetics of pathogens, he developed molecular markers and used molecular fingerprinting to understand transmission pathways.

Morris honed his laboratory techniques over the next decade, then used them in clinical epidemiological research. He also served on National Academy of Sciences panels, addressing government policies on food-borne disease. An outspoken critic, he helped restructure US Department of Agriculture regulations to include the first microbial standards for food safety. "That was an exciting couple of years, watching ideas take shape into regulation," he says.

He now plans to use his public health and policy know-how as the director of the University of Florida's new \$50-million Emerging Pathogens Institute in Gainesville. Myron Levine, director of the University of Maryland's Center for Vaccine Development, says that Morris's wide-ranging mix of talents make him well suited to head an institute in a state susceptible to myriad food- and water-borne infectious diseases.

Noting Morris's work in Thailand, James Hughes, a former director of the CDC's centre for infectious diseases who is now at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, says that although many in the infectious diseases field try to combine strengths in epidemiology and microbiology, "solid international experience is vitally important".

Virginia Gewin

BRICKS & MORTAR

Northern exposure for EMBL

The European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), Europe's foremost molecular-biology institution, is extending its reach to the north. As part of efforts to establish laboratory partnerships with Nordic countries, EMBL plans this year to set up a new laboratory in Umeå, a coastal city on the Gulf of Bothnia, 650 kilometres north of Stockholm. One of the hopes, says future laboratory director Bernt Eric Uhlin, is to build a sustainable national resource that will link Europe's Nordic countries to EMBL, which currently has five labs in Germany, France, Italy and Britain.

The lab will be part of the first EMBL partnership in molecular infectious medicine in the Nordic countries. Others will include the Institute for Molecular Medicine Finland, which specializes in genetic epidemiology, and the Centre for Molecular Biology and Neuroscience at the University of Oslo.

The goal is for Umeå to become a Swedish node in EMBL. The new funding will allow up to seven young researchers to be recruited internationally and to establish research groups, for the time being in existing buildings and departments.

The new laboratory will focus on molecular infectious medicine,

drawing from 25 existing affiliated groups in microbiology, molecular biology, chemistry and physics that collaborate via the Umeå Centre for Microbial Research. Known as one of the best places to study bacterial pathogenesis in Europe, the centre has expertise in infection biology and molecular microbiology, says Uhlin. "The new groups should thrive in this scientific environment," he says.

The partnership gives scientists the chance to work for six to eight years "to develop their skills in an interesting environment and then go on to other universities", says Lars Börjesson, secretary-general of the Swedish Research Council's Committee for Research Infrastructures.

It also stands to draw international attention to Sweden's biomedical research. "We think there should be more European exposure of Sweden's research," says Börjesson, who hopes it will also stimulate Sweden's biomedical research community.

The Swedish government provided just under half of the funding, with the rest coming from Umeå University. The total invested in the project is €18.5 million (US\$25 million). Most will be spent on staff, but some will be invested in shared technical platforms and equipment.

Hannah Hoag

POSTDOC JOURNAL

Perception versus reality

The closer the meeting got, the more I dreaded going. I hadn't had much interest in my work before the meeting, and I also hated going so far from home. I'm in my third trimester of pregnancy, so I am very big and I tire easily. The idea of schlepping my luggage all over airports and sleeping in a strange bed was not appealing. But I went.

The travel was terrible; we missed three flights, dinner and both plenary talks on the first day. Once there, things improved. I chatted with many other pregnant women in the community about how they're coping. There was even a husband and wife who took turns to care for their 18-month-old son while the other parent attended individual sessions. When I spoke to the husband, he asked why I hadn't brought my son along.

I have to admit, I was surprised to find out how many researchers, men and women, had small children. In general, other researchers' family lives seemed so hidden to me before now. Are such discussions taboo or just mundane? I used to think it was the former, but now I'm inclined to believe it's the latter. For me, it's just life. I often feel as if I have to explain to others what having children entails — especially to single people and those without children. But now I see that plenty of other people don't think it's an extraordinary feat. Who was I trying to convince, them or myself?

Moira Sheehan is a postdoc in plant breeding and genetics at Cornell University.