

Mirroring Medicine: Medals from the Collection of Dr. Ira Rezak

An Exhibition, Oct. 21, 2012 – January 11, 2013

Hammer Health Sciences Center, Lower Level 2

The Augustus C. Long Health Sciences Library at the Columbia University Medical Center is pleased to present “Mirroring Medicine,” an exhibition of medical-themed medals from the collection of Dr. Ira Rezak, Professor Emeritus of Medicine at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. More than 275 items from 30 countries are on display dating from the 3rd to the 21st centuries. Besides being curious, rare, and informative, the medals displayed are often works of fine art in their own right.

Dr. Rezak’s medical medal collection, formed over 50 years, is one of the most important in private hands. It includes coins, tokens, amulets and votives, badges, prizes, decorations, plaquettes (rectangular medals), medallions (medals for walls), as well as medals proper. The collection encompasses medicine in its broadest sense: medals relating to nursing, dentistry, hospitals, medical education, public health, pharmacy, and physical rehabilitation are all on display. Other topics represented by items in the show include disaster relief, blood transfusion, religion and medicine, alternative medicine, and the role of water in health.

Among the many rare and unusual items on display are a bread distribution token issued during the 1930s Spanish Civil War; a 16th century German amulet used to ward off the bubonic plague; a 1772 Dutch student entry pass to Amsterdam’s medical botanic garden; a Canadian medal from 1994 celebrating the white mouse as a benefactor of medical science; and a recent Portuguese medal depicting the brain's neural tangles caused by Alzheimer’s disease.

Portrait medals of distinguished physicians are especially well-represented in the exhibition. Included are medals for Sigmund Freud’s 50th birthday in 1906; the Charaka Club medal presented to William Osler, ca.1903; a 70th birthday medal for Louis Pasteur (1892); and a 1932 medal honoring Spanish neuroanatomist Santiago Ramon y Cajal. One of the most curious may be a small medal issued to honor French physician Joseph Guillotin; the medal commemorates not his invention of the guillotine but rather his less notorious role as president of the French Academy of Medicine in 1807-08.

In addition, the show includes a case of medals representing medicine in New York, including items related to the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, Mount Sinai Medical Center, New York Medical College, Lenox Hill Hospital and many other institutions and persons.

The exhibition is open from 7am to 9pm on Lower Level 2 of the Columbia University Medical Center’s Hammer Health Sciences Center. Access is allowed to all those holding Columbia University or New York-Presbyterian Hospital identification.

Those without authorized access who wish to see the show should contact the email address below to make arrangements.

For more information, or to arrange to see the exhibition, please contact hslarchives@columbia.edu

Dr. Ira Rezak is a graduate of Columbia College (1959) and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine (1963). After an internship at SUNY Syracuse and two years' service in the US Navy, he served as resident in internal medicine at Montefiore Medical Center and was Fellow in pulmonary medicine at Albert Einstein. He was on the faculty of SUNY Stony Brook School of Medicine from 1970 to 2010 where he became Professor of Clinical Medicine (now Emeritus). While at Stony Brook he was head of the MICU and of pulmonary medicine, secretary of the Faculty Senate, head of the physical diagnosis course, and founder and organizer of the School's History of Medicine Group.

Dr. Rezak is a Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine, the American College of Physicians and the American Numismatic Society. For the past 15 years he has been President of the Harry G. Friedman Society of the Jewish Museum.