Contraception Pioneer, Former MBL Board Chair Sheldon Segal Dies at 83
October 17, 2009

MBL, Woods Hole, MA—It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Sheldon "Shelly" Segal, who died on October 17 at his home in Woods Hole. Shelly was formerly chairman of the MBL Board of Trustees, an MBL Trustee and Honorary Trustee (1992 to present), and formerly an MBL visiting investigator. He was a Distinguished Scientist at the Population Council in New York, New York.

The MBL flag has been lowered in Shelly's memory and a memorial service will be held in Woods Hole on November 15 at 11AM in the MBL's Meigs Room.

A leading authority on global population issues, family planning, and contraceptive technology, Shelly directed the research that led to the development of many widely used contraceptives, including the modern IUD and Norplant, which provide contraception for more than 120 million women globally. Shelly's 2003 memoir, Under the Banyan Tree (Oxford University Press) describes a career devoted not only to basic scientific research, but also to forging collaborations in the clinical, pharmaceutical, social, and political realms in order to improve family planning practices and population policy throughout the world. These collaborations leave a legacy of scientists and policy makers from all over the world working to make education and comprehensive health services available for all people, particularly women and girls in traditionally underserved regions.

Shelly joined the Population Council in 1956 and left in 1978 to become director of the Rockefeller Foundation's newly formed Division of Population Sciences. He returned to the Population Council in 1991. He was also an adjunct professor of clinical pharmacology at Weill Cornell Medical College.

Shelly was a long-time MBL scientist and supporter who will be deeply missed. Of his regular visits to the laboratory he said, "You can stand on the corner of MBL Street and Water Street in Woods Hole and meet every currently and newly important scientist. No other place in the world has the kind of scientific ambiance that the MBL has." Shelly also championed the progress of young investigators, graduate students and undergraduates. He was a mentor to countless young scientists who now have distinguished careers around the globe, many of whom came to the MBL under his guidance.

Shelly first came to the MBL in 1957 as a guest investigator in the laboratory of Albert Tyler and Alberto milanro, where he studied the effect of a chemical compound on fertilization and embryo development in the sea urchin Arbacia. This basic research led eventually to the pharmaceutical development of the fertility drug Comid. In the 1970s, Shelly and the late Luigi "Lu" Mastroianni, Jr., of University of Pennsylvania Medical Center, shared a lab at the MBL for several years where they conducted basic research on the interaction of sperm and egg in the process of fertilization, using Arbacia and the surf clam as models. Shelly and Lu also played an important role in the founding of the MBL Fertilization and Gamete Physiology research training program, the forerunner to the current Frontiers in Reproduction (FR) program.

During his tenure as chairman of the MBL Board of Trustees (1991-2002), Shelly left an indelible mark on the institution. He helped lead the MBL's first capital campaign, the Discovery Campaign, which nearly doubled its goal of $25 million and helped lay the foundation for a strategic planning initiative at the MBL that is being successfully fulfilled to this date.

According to William T. Speck, MBL director and CEO from 2001 to 2008, "Shelly's leadership was transformational in that it forever changed the governance of the institution to convey the reality that the MBL was no longer a summer research and teaching facility but rather a major year-round academic center. This transformation involved consensus building on a grand scale and the creation of a new governance structure."
In 2003, the MBL established The Luigi Mastroianni and Sheldon Segal Scholarship Fund with a gift from the 9th World Congress on Human Reproduction. This endowed scholarship fund partially supports students in the Frontiers in Reproduction course.

In 2003, Shelly and the Population Council were awarded the Prix Galien USA Pro Sono Humanum Award for their role in developing implantable hormone delivery systems. Also in 2003, he received the Society of Family Planning's Lifetime Achievement Award. Shelly was a member of the National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine and was the 1994 Laureate of the United Nations Population Award. He formerly served as advisor to the World Health Organization and to the United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank, the European Parliament, and the U.S. Congress. He was the author of over 300 publications in the field of embryology, endocrinology, the biology of reproduction, contraceptive development, and family planning. Shelly received his B.A. at Dartmouth and held a Ph.D. in embryology and biochemistry from the University of Iowa, in addition to three honorary doctorates.

Shelly had a deep affection for the MBL and Woods Hole. He traveled the world, but Woods Hole was closest to his heart. He regularly attended Friday Evening Lectures and many other academic events at the MBL. He loved sailing his boat, the Sea-Mast, which he shared with Luigi, and playing tennis with his numerous friends and colleagues. He was the long-time doubles partner of Ezra Laderman, and they played in many MBL tennis tournaments over several decades.

Shelly leaves his loving wife Harriet, his daughters Amy, Jennifer, and Laura, his sons-in-law Andrew Blum, Dave Madden, and Matt Petrie, as well as his seven grandchildren, Peter, Thomas, Madeleine, Charlotte, Honor, Jenna, and Cooper.