

DR. DICK VAN DER HELM



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AWARD OF MERIT RECIPIENT
FOR 1980

At the annual meeting in 1980, Dr. Dick van der Helm received the Award of Merit of the Oklahoma Academy of Science in recognition of his research on molecular structure determinations with single-crystal X-ray diffraction. He is recognized for his contributions to the fields of microbial iron transport, marine organisms, stereochemistry and crystallography. Most of his structural work is on compounds of biological interest and ranges from siderophores, peptides and terpenes to heterocyclic compounds and metal complexes. These contributions have appeared in more than 135 technical papers.

Dick received his education in the Netherlands and was trained in single-crystal X-ray diffraction by Professor C. H. MacGillavry. In 1957 he moved to the U.S. and worked for 2 years with Professor Lynne L. Merritt at Indiana University and after that for more than three, extremely useful, years with Dr. A. L. Patterson at the Institute for Cancer Research in Philadelphia. During those years he was in the forefront of those who applied the new power of computers to crystallography and moved the technique from the then common projectional approach to the 3-dimensional methods. His pride, although he feels it only partially earned, was that in those days Patterson told lecture audiences that Dick had shown him, with his work, the real power of the vector synthesis (Patterson) method. In 1962 Dick was appointed as Assistant Professor at the University of Oklahoma and in seven years was promoted to Professor; eight years later he was named George Lynn Cross Research Professor. During these years he spent a sabbatical leave at the University of Groningen and one at Utah State University as Visiting Professor. Dick was also the recipient of the prestigious NIH Cancer Career Development Award from 1969 till 1974. At this time his research is supported by two external grants and working together with Dick are 5 postdoctoral students and 1 graduate student.

During the years at the University of Oklahoma, he has trained 12 doctoral students and more than 10 postdoctoral students. The research that Dick and his students performed brought national and international recognition. In concrete terms, this excellence generated more than 1.4 million dollars in external funds granted to the University of Oklahoma. In professional terms this excellence led to recognition in the form of many appointments to committees of the American Crystallographic Association, election as member of the USA National Committee for Crystallography, election as chairman of the small-molecule crystallographers, host and organizer of the national meeting of the American Crystallographic Association in 1978, one of the initiators and principal fund raiser for the new Patterson Award, invited lecturer in Canada, Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Netherlands, and appointment to the Committee on Public Policy of the American Institute of Physics.