

Transitions

◀ **Richard Kron**, professor of astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Chicago and a scientist at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, became director of the Sloan Digital Sky Survey this month, succeeding **John Peoples**.

◀ **John Hood**, who is currently vice-chancellor of the University of Auckland, New Zealand, was nominated last month to become the University of Oxford's next vice-chancellor. If the university's 'parliament of dons' approves the nomination, Hood will leave New Zealand for Britain next summer, where he will take over from **Colin Lucas**.

◀ **Randal Richards** will take up the post of director of research and innovation at the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council this October, replacing **David Clark**. Richards is currently head of the department of chemistry at the University of Durham.

◀ Last month **Eugenio Coccia** became director of the National Laboratories of Gran Sasso in Italy. Coccia was most recently full professor of gravitational physics at the University of Rome Tor Vergata. He succeeds **Alessandro Bettini**.

◀ **Robert Wells**, director of the Center for Genome Research at the Institute of Biosciences and Technology, Texas A&M University, Houston, began his term as president of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology this month.

◀ **David King** became director of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, last month, after serving as deputy director. He succeeds **Art Stephenson**.

PUBLIC HEALTH

David Fleming, the new director of global health strategies for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, points to the importance of electives in steering one's career.

While in his fourth year of medical school at New York University, he opted into a public-health course. He liked it so much that he went on to join a training programme at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that puts freshly minted PhDs and MDs on the 'front lines' of public health, and in 1984 became an epidemic-intelligence officer. That led to 15 years of public-health work for the state of Oregon, before he returned to the CDC in 2000 as deputy director for science and public health.

At the CDC, Fleming looked at specific diseases within the United States. At the Gates foundation, he will look more broadly, both in terms of illnesses and geography, a factor that attracted him to the job. He advises young scientists not to be too narrowly focused early in their career. "Part of your career needs to be looking at things outside your career that make you happy," he says.

CHEMICAL BIOLOGY

James Rothman will be moving uptown this year. The programme chairman of cellular biochemistry and biophysics at the Sloan-Kettering Institute in New York will establish a centre for chemical biology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. The move from one part of Manhattan to another is fairly conventional compared with his early career, which Rothman describes as his "oddball background".

He started out with aspirations in theoretical physics, but soon learnt that there were few jobs in the field. So he opted instead for medical school, which he found wasn't right for his basic-science bent. "But it was a very helpful several years," he says, because it introduced him to biology.

Rothman found a home at last in biochemistry at Harvard University, where he could draw on his diverse education to look at basic biological processes, but in chemical terms. Stints at Stanford and Princeton taught him to look for big-picture problems and eschew short-term gratification in lieu of long-term results — something that he fears today's publish-or-perish environment is discouraging.

In the process of setting up the new centre, he hopes to help define what chemical biology is exactly; he now sees it as using chemicals to probe biological functions. He also thinks chemistry could improve understanding of gene function. Biochemistry can reproduce a process



David Fleming



James Rothman



Eric Jakobsson



Martin Nowak

outside a cell, but the regulation conferred by a cell is lost in the process — his new institute will grapple with that problem.

BIOINFORMATICS

While at university, **Eric Jakobsson** learnt that he didn't want to be boxed in. "There are enormous pressures in academia to be quite specialized," he says. "And yet so much of the future depends on working across disciplines."

Jakobsson will have the opportunity to do just that as the first director of the Center for Bioinformatics and Computational Biology at the US National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) in Bethesda, Maryland. His background should help, as he inadvertently trained across disciplines. He first worked as an engineer for a few years before returning to academia to get a PhD in physics. But he has spent much of his career working with biologists, especially in modelling how molecules are transported within a cell.

Before moving to the NIGMS last month, Jakobsson was a professor in molecular and integrative physiology, biophysics, neuroscience and bioengineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a professor at the university's Beckman Institute, and a research scientist at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications.

MATHEMATICAL BIOLOGY

Martin Nowak this month moved from one Ivy League institution to another. The Austrian-born theoretical biologist left the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton to establish a new institute for mathematical biology at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, funded in part by a reported \$30-million grant by Jeffrey Epstein, a New York-based investment manager.

Apart from allowing him to interact with both the department of organismic and evolutionary biology and the maths department, Nowak is looking to expand his horizons beyond traditional boundaries. One of the reasons he made the move is the prospect of more and varied local collaborations. In particular he is eager to work with **Eric Lander**, director of the Broad Institute, and Harvard cognitive scientist **Steven Pinker**.

Nowak also wants to spread the word to students that maths opens up avenues for such collaborations — and interesting careers. "One of the perspectives of the new institute is to convey the idea to mathematics students that they can have careers in many different fields," Nowak says.

CONTACTING US AT MOVERS

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