Melvin D. Yahr L-dopa (Levo-dopa) Case Records, Finding Aid

L-dopa (Levo-dopa) Case Records, c. 1930-1945,  
17.35 cubic feet (18 records cartons)

Biographical Note: Melvin Yahr, neurologist, was born in New York City on November 18, 1917. He received his A.B. (1939) and M.D. (1943) from New York University and served internships in neurology at Lenox Hill and Montefiore Hospitals. He joined the department of neurology at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons (P&S) in 1948 as a research assistant and rose through a series of academic appointments, eventually becoming H. Houston Merritt Professor of Neurology in 1970.

Yahr’s main research interest throughout his career was Parkinson’s Disease. In the late 1960s, he conducted one of the earliest randomized clinical trials of the amino acid L-dopa (levo-dopa), which showed its dramatic results in ameliorating Parkinson’s Disease. L-dopa was the first, and remains the most commonly used, medical treatment for the disease. With Margaret Hoehn, he authored “Parkinsonism: Onset, Progression and Mortality” (1967), a classic article which established the “Hoehn-Yahr scale” for determining the severity of Parkinson’s.

Yahr served as chairman of the department of neurology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine from 1973 to 1992, and was thereafter chairman emeritus and Aidekman Family Professor of Neurological Research. He was active in many scientific organizations and served the Parkinson’s Disease Foundation in various roles from 1958 to his death.

Melvin Yahr died in New York City on January 1, 2004.

Scope and Content: The records are comprised of about 14.5 cubic feet of clinical records of patients with Parkinson’s Disease, most of whom appear to have been included in Yahr’s early clinical trials of L-dopa. The records date from about 1965 to 1985, with the majority being from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. A small amount of correspondence with pharmaceutical companies is also included.

There are about 40 to 50 reels of film and about a dozen videotapes. Most of the film cans are not titled; those that are generally have the names of patients who are included in the patient records and date from the late 1960s. The videotapes also appear to be of patients.

Another cubic foot of clinical records are of patients with epidemic encephalitis (“encephalitis lethargica”) seen by members of the Matheson Commission on Epidemic Encephalitis, which was conducted by the College of Physicians and Surgeons in the
1920s-1940s. The records date from approximately 1930 to 1940. It is not known why Yahr took these records with him when he left Columbia for Mount Sinai in 1973, but it may be related to speculation at the time that epidemic encephalitis and Parkinson’s Disease might be related.

**ACCESS:** The records are stored off-site and will take 1-2 days to retrieve. Researchers must call in advance to use the collection.

Because Protected Health Information (PHI) as defined by the US Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) may be found throughout the records, access is allowed only under the terms of Archives and Special Collections’ *Access Policy to Records Containing Protected Health Information*.

Access to the film is restricted until it can be transferred to a more stable medium.

**PROVENANCE:** Gift of Juna Kollmeier, Yahr’s research assistant, 2004 (acc. #2004.06.28)

**SUBJECTS**

Yahr, Melvin D. (Melvin David), 1917-
Matheson Commission.
Clinical trials.
Epidemic encephalitis.
Parkinson’s disease – Treatment.
Parkinsonism – Drug therapy.
Medical records.

**L-dopa case records**

Box 1: A – Ben
Box 2: Ber – Bre
Box 3: Bri – Dil
Box 4: Du – Gilbert, E.
Box 5: Gilbert, S. – Hof
Box 6: Hor – Lab
Box 7: Lau – Manc
Box 8: Mand – Met
Box 9: Mi – Per
Box 10: Pet – Sab
Box 11: Sac – Singer, M.
Box 12: Singer, Y. – Wein
Box 13: Weis – Z; miscellaneous Parkinson’s cases (may not have been in L-dopa trials)
Box 14: Miscellaneous Parkinson’s cases (may not have been in L-dopa trials)

Box 15: Miscellaneous Parkinson’s cases (may not have been in L-dopa trials)
   Correspondence with pharmaceutical companies, 1968-1977
   “List of deceased Parkinson’s patients”
   Matheson Commission on Epidemic Encephalitis: Patient records, A – L

Box 16: Matheson Commission on Epidemic Encephalitis: Patient records, M – Z
Boxes 17-18: film and video