

Dr. Robert B. Wilson, MD, PhD

In early 1998 — before FARA was established — FARA's founders knew that, if the organization were to be effective, it must be devoted to supporting research that was judged to be meritorious by a review of the applicants' scientific peers. It became clear that FARA's Board of Directors would have to include a core of top-notch FA scientists that would comprise a Scientific Review Committee to lead the peer reviews, and that Committee would need a chairperson. Acting on advice from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), FARA's founders met with Dr. Robert Wilson of the University of Pennsylvania.



Dr. Wilson had already conducted important FA research, having done much of the work on yeast homologues that helped determine that iron played a critical role in the disorder. He agreed immediately to serve as a founding member of FARA's Board of Directors and as Chairman of its Scientific Review Committee. He also agreed that the first objective of the organization should be that of conducting the first international FA scientific conference. He began immediately preparing a conference grant application to NIH and on September 29, 1998 — the day after FARA was officially established — FARA submitted the application to the NIH. That conference was held early in 1999, with Dr. Wilson serving as its Principal Investigator, Chairman, and scientific organizer. He again prepared the grant application and served in the same capacities for the February 2003 conference. He co-authored the scientific report on the 2003 conference, to be available in "Neuromuscular Disorders" 2004 Jan;14(1):70-82; Seznec H, Wilson RB, Puccio H.

In the years between those two conferences and since, Dr. Wilson has led FARA's scientific endeavors. He has chaired the Scientific Review Committee's conduct of most of FARA's peer reviews, making the key recommendations involved in awarding about one million dollars in FARA research grants. He has also continued his own FA research and participated in the concerted effort to develop ataxia scales. In addition, Dr. Wilson somehow finds the time to teach at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and fulfill clinical responsibilities at the University Hospital, while being a husband and father of two boys.

Dr. Wilson is Associate Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and has served as Acting Director and Associate Director of that Department's Molecular Diagnosis Laboratory. He holds baccalaureate degrees in both Music and Biochemistry from Brown University, where he was an Honors Graduate in both disciplines, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, and Magna Cum Laude. He earned his M.D. and PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. He has received a number of prestigious research and teaching awards and has published numerous articles, abstracts, and lectures. He has received research grants from NIH, the National Science Foundation, Veterans Administration, MDA, NAF, the McCabe Fund, the American Cancer Society, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Rob Wilson has earned the respect and gratitude of FA families around the world.