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David Kritchevsky, Ph.D. (1920-2006): Longtime Wistar Institute Professor Internationally Recognized for Research on Diet and Disease

(PHILADELPHIA) – David Kritchevsky, Ph.D., an internationally recognized expert in the role of dietary fats in heart disease and cancer, died on November 20, 2006, at the age of 86.

Dr. Kritchevsky, Caspar Wistar Scholar at The Wistar Institute, had been associated with the Institute since 1957. With continuous support from a Research Career Award from the National Institutes of Health dating to 1961 and many other sources, Dr. Kritchevsky was a lively contributor to the ongoing national debate on nutrition and health for almost six decades.

In addition to his distinguished career in medical research, he was also noted for his humorous take on life and the scientific enterprise, perhaps expressed best in a series of songs which he used to entertain while also teaching about science. Among these were the "Cholesterol Biosynthesis Song," sung to the tune of "Jingle Bells," "Macrophage," sung to the tune of "Mack the Knife," and "If I Had a Big Grant," sung to the tune of "If I Was a Rich Man," from Fiddler on the Roof.

Born in Kharkov, Russia, in 1920, Dr. Kritchevsky earned his B.A. in chemistry and an M.S. degree in organic chemistry from the University of Chicago in 1939 and 1942 respectively. He was awarded a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Northwestern University in 1948. After a postdoctoral fellowship in Nobel-Prize winner Leopold Ruzicka's laboratory at the Federal Research Institute in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1948 and 1949, he served as a staff member in the Bio-Organic Group of the Radiation Laboratory with another Nobel Prize winner, Melvin Calvin, at the University of California, Berkeley, from 1950 to 1952. From 1952 to 1957, he was a staff member in the Virus and Rickettsial Research Section at Lederle Laboratories in Pearl River, NY, where he met Dr. Hilary Koprowski. When Dr. Koprowski was named director of The Wistar Institute in 1957, he invited Dr. Kritchevsky to join him at the Institute.

Dr. Kritchevsky was an associate member of the Institute faculty from 1957 to 1962. From 1962 to 1975, he was a member of the faculty. In 1975, he became associate director of Wistar and served in that position until 1991. He was named Caspar Wistar Scholar at the Institute in 1985 and retained that title for the duration of his career.

Additionally, Dr. Kritchevsky was a member of the Graduate Group on Molecular Biology at the University of Pennsylvania from 1965 to 1992, serving as chairman of that group from 1972 to 1984. He was also a member of the Graduate Group on Biochemistry at Penn from 1965 to 1992 and of Penn's Graduate Group on Pathology from 1971 to 1995. He was a professor of biochemistry in surgery at Penn from 1972 to 1992, an adjunct professor of biochemistry at the Medical College of Pennsylvania from 1988 to 1998, and the Wistar Professor of Biochemistry in the School of Veterinary Medicine at Penn from 1966 to 2001. He was Professor Emeritus at Penn at the time of his death.

Dr. Kritchevsky authored the first book on cholesterol in 1958 and, in 1981 with O.J. Pollak, the first book on sitosterol, an extract with anti-cholesterol properties found wheat germ oil, corn oil, and other grain or nut oils. He received many national and international awards during his lifetime, including The Auenbrugger Medal, University of Graz; the Special Recognition Award, Council on Arteriosclerosis, American Heart Association; and the Research Achievement Award, American Institute of Cancer Research. He was one of the few scientists recognized for his research in both the heart disease and cancer fields.

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In 2006, the American Society for Nutrition announced the establishment of the David Kritchevsky Career Achievement Award in Nutrition, to be awarded annually. More than 12,000 biological and biomedical scientists gathered in San Francisco for Experimental Biology 2006, where Dr. Kritchevsky gave the inaugural award lecture on April 2. (The American Society for Nutrition is one of several societies that hold their own annual meetings to coincide with the Experimental Biology meeting.)

Dr. Kritchevsky was a past president of the American Society of Nutritional Sciences (then known as the American Institute of Nutrition); the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine; and the John Morgan Society. He also served on numerous editorial boards and scientific advisory committees in academia, government, and industry.

Over the course of his long career, Dr. Kritchevsky organized many conferences and symposia, and his expertise took him all over the world. He lectured on every continent (except Antarctica), in most European countries, several African countries, and in Asia. Until 2000, he lectured about 15 times a year across the U.S. He was frequently invited to speak at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh, and London in the U.K., and in Austria, France, Germany, and Italy.

Dr. Kritchevsky mentored many people in diverse fields of biochemistry, lipid metabolism, nutrition, and cardiovascular disease. Many of his students have gone on to illustrious careers in academia, government, and industry. He encouraged scientific curiosity and independence in his students and was generous with his time and ideas when they returned for advice. His generosity extended to his technicians, who were included as authors on his many papers. As a result, some Wistar technicians have larger bibliographies than some faculty. Dr. Kritchevsky's body of published work includes 421 research publications, the most recent in September 2006.

Dr. Kritchevsky is survived by his wife of 58 years, Evelyn, their children Barbara, Janice, and Stephen, and six grandchildren.

A memorial service is scheduled for Saturday, December 9, 2006. Details will be announced later.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the David Kritchevsky Memorial Fund, Account # 119-3380, at the Bryn Mawr Trust Company, 801 West Lancaster Avenue, Bryn Mawr, PA, 19010, or to the charitable organization of the donor's choice.

The Wistar Institute is an international leader in biomedical research, with special expertise in cancer research and vaccine development. Founded in 1892 as the first independent nonprofit biomedical research institute in the country, Wistar has long held the prestigious Cancer Center designation from the National Cancer Institute. Discoveries at Wistar have led to the creation of the rubella vaccine that eradicated the disease in the U.S., rabies vaccines used worldwide, and a new rotavirus vaccine approved in 2006. Wistar scientists have also identified many cancer genes and developed monoclonal antibodies and other important research tools. Today, Wistar is home to eminent melanoma researchers and pioneering scientists working on experimental vaccines against flu, HIV, and other diseases. The Institute works actively to transfer its inventions to the commercial sector to ensure that research advances move from the laboratory to the clinic as quickly as possible. The Wistar Institute: Today's Discoveries – Tomorrow's Cures. On the web at www.wistar.org.