



William A. Carlezon, Jr., Ph.D.



Suzanne N. Haber, Ph.D.

**Interview with Fellow ACNP Member,
William A. Carlezon, Jr., Ph.D.
Interviewed by Suzanne N. Haber, Ph.D.**

William A. Carlezon Jr., Ph.D. (“Bill”) is a Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the inaugural holder of the Phyllis and Jerome Lyle Rappaport Chair in Psychiatry at McLean Hospital, where he serves as Chief of the Basic Neuroscience Division. Over the course of his career, he has worked in both the pharmaceutical industry and academic settings. As a postdoctoral fellow, he pioneered the use of in vivo viral-mediated gene transfer to study drug- and stress-induced neuroadaptations in the brain circuits that regulate motivation and emotion. He joined McLean in 1998, establishing the Behavioral Genetics Laboratory, focusing on the effects of stress on the brain, peripheral systems, and behavior. A distinguishing feature of his approach is emphasis on the use of translationally-relevant endpoints in animal models, to enable alignment with research in humans and facilitate the development and validation of cross-species biomarkers. He was the 2025 ACNP President, is the Principal Editor (PE) and founder of the journal *NPP-Digital Psychiatry and Neuroscience*, a Scientific Advisory Board Member for Cure Addiction Now, and a consultant for numerous pharmaceutical companies. In addition, he has held previous leadership roles including PE of *Neuropsychopharmacology* (NPP) and Scientific Advisory Board Member for Autism Speaks and the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism. He has won numerous prestigious awards for his research (including the ACNP Efron Award), service (including the ACNP Hoch Award), and mentoring (including McLean’s Cataldo Award), and is an elected fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

What was your position when you joined ACNP and how has your career advanced to your current position?

The first ACNP meeting I attended was in 1996, as an invited speaker during my postdoctoral training. Since then, I have never missed a meeting. I became an Associate Member in 2000 as an Assistant Professor, a Member in 2004 as an Associate Professor, and a Fellow in 2012 as a full Professor. I realize that the process of advancing within ACNP has become more competitive with each year, and I feel fortunate to have succeeded at each step. I firmly believe that being part of the ACNP, both as an annual meeting attendee learning about the newest scientific breakthroughs and as a member involved in running the organization, has facilitated every step of career advancement at my home institution.

When you joined ACNP, what was your main reason for becoming a member?

The small size of the meeting combined with the easy accessibility of my scientific heroes have always been a major part of ACNP's appeal. However, I have also welcomed the ability to contribute by serving on committees, which are small enough that everyone can be heard. I admire the fact that one voice, and one idea, can make lasting changes to the organization. I have seen countless examples of this over my 30 years of attending. ACNP is truly an organization that is run by its members, in partnership with the most capable staff you will ever find.

In your perspective, how has ACNP changed throughout the years?

The most noticeable change has been growth of the annual meeting. It is now twice as big it was in 1996, and we've outgrown some venues that are sentimental favorites. The fastest growth is in non-member attendees. One concern is that growth that is rapid and not carefully managed will lead to loss of some of the features that, historically, have made ACNP so appealing. We don't want to be a victim of our own success! We tried to address this thoughtfully and transparently during my term as 2025 ACNP President, and I think it will continue to be at the forefront of challenges we face for the foreseeable future.

Have you served in any ACNP leadership roles, and if so, what motivated you to do so?

I feel like I have been on almost every committee at one time or another! I have also served as the PE of NPP, and more recently as founding editor of our new journal, *NPP Digital Psychiatry and Neuroscience*. I think that serving as chair of the Program Committee and chair of what was once called the Public Information Committee have been especially helpful with running the journals. Roles on these committees helped me to recognize where the most impactful advances are occurring and how to reach broad audiences that include specialists as well as lay people seeking information about a brain-related condition that has touched them or a loved one. Collectively, all of these roles prepared me to be the ACNP President in 2025, which has been a career-defining honor and privilege.

What accomplishment are you most proud of and why does it stand out in your long distinguished career?

This is a difficult question. I think that my most lasting and impactful contribution is work I did as a postdoc to develop in vivo viral-mediated gene transfer, bring it to the mainstream, and establish that it is safe and effective. It is hard to remember life in the lab without this core technique, but at the beginning there were major concerns about whether it would work at all—or even worse, if it would make the animals or the experimenters using it sick. This work helped to hasten the development of next-generation techniques such as optogenetics and chemogenetics that have truly revolutionized the field, and it led directly to my lab's discovery of the antidepressant effects of kappa-opioid receptor antagonists, which are currently in clinical trials for the treatment of depression. We continue to study how stress affects the brain and behavior, with increasing focus on endpoints that can be used across species—especially those that can be obtained in humans via devices like smartphones and wearables. But I am equally proud of contributions I've made to the ACNP via service on the Membership Committee (e.g., introducing mini-panels and the data blitz), as journal editor (e.g., launching the journal awards,

our social media presence, internship positions, and a spin-off journal), and as 2025 ACNP President. Across these roles, I've tried to create new opportunities to participate, enhance visibility at all career levels, and encourage creativity.

What do you foresee to be the main challenges for the field going forward?

As a basic neuroscience researcher, I am most focused on how we can make our models better predictors of outcomes in humans. This requires thinking carefully about translationally-relevant measurements and endpoints, so we can compare “apples to apples”. With the advent of digital phenotyping and broad accessibility of smartphones and wearables, many of us are more aware than ever about things like our sleep architecture, heart rate, energy expenditure, and walking pace and gait. Coincidentally, all of these represent cross-species endpoints that are potentially useful biomarkers of brain health. It is an exciting challenge to think about how we can improve our understanding of brain-body connections using cross-species studies, and how biomarkers reflecting these connections be useful in diagnosing, treating, and even preventing neuropsychiatric illness.

Looking back, what have you valued the most about being an ACNP member?

The ability to make meaningful contributions to the evolution of our field, and see some of my ideas turned into reality.

What memories stand out about your experiences or your colleagues?

ACNP feels like family to me. It has brought many scientific opportunities but also opportunities to do things that I never imagined would bring such joy. The annual meeting has been a setting that has enabled me to interact with my scientific heroes, watch my contemporaries shape their careers, and feel like I am part of a bright future for the field. I have learned how to run large organizations from some of the best leaders and business minds I've ever met. I also have many fond memories of bringing trainees to the meeting and having my own family with me, and I am proud of how the organization has always been welcoming to all attendees.

What recommendations would you have for junior members of ACNP?

My ACNP-specific advice for junior members is to become involved. ACNP is an exceptionally well-run organization, and there is much to gain from participation. You should volunteer for committees that work on things you are passionate about, and bring back what you learn to enrich your day job. If selected for committee service, don't be shy about sharing your ideas, which can end up having a lasting impact. One especially wonderful thing about this organization is that every voice can make a difference.