

Autism Researcher a GQ "Rock Star of Science"  
Fran Lowry

November 29, 2010 — Geraldine Dawson, PhD, has dedicated her life to finding effective treatments for people with autism. Now, she finds herself up close and personal with celebrity rock star Jay Sean in the December issue of *GQ Magazine*, highlighting the need for more research into a disease that is becoming increasingly prevalent in the United States.

Dr. Dawson appears as one of several "Rock Stars of Science" featured in a special 6-page spread in *GQ's* "Men of the Year" edition, which went on newsstands November 23.

The feature is sponsored by designer menswear giant Geoffrey Beene, whose charity organization, Geoffrey Beene Gives Back, donates 100% of its net profits to promote research dedicated to finding cures for diseases that "threaten our future."

The hope is that highlighting the work that these superstar researchers like Dr. Dawson do will boost interest in medical research, encourage more young people to enter careers in science, and educate the public about the need for more science funding.

"If we invest in research, we will save lives now and trillions of dollars later," G. Thompson Hutton, chief executive officer and trustee of the Geoffrey Beene Foundation, said in a press release.

"Great Fun"

Dr. Dawson, chief science officer for Autism Speaks, research professor of psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, adjunct professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, and professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Washington, told *Medscape Medical News* that the photo shoot was "really great fun."

"They paired me up with Jay Sean, who is just a delightful man from the UK. I was really interested to hear that he actually was a medical student. He was about halfway through medical school in London when he landed his first contract in the music industry and decided that that's what he wanted to do. But he has a great appreciation for science and medicine," she said.

Sean also taught Dr. Dawson how to adopt the pose of a rock star. "That was hilarious," she said with a laugh.

One of the most fun parts of the shoot was getting to choose a special wardrobe.

"I actually got to go in and choose from lots of leather jackets and high heels and boots. I got some great clothing that my 16-year-old daughter absolutely could die for. She



Autism Speaks Chief Science Officer Geraldine Dawson, PhD, left, a "Rock Star of Science," joins fellow "Rock Stars" and rocker Jay Sean. *Photo by Kurt Iswarienko.*

wanted me to bring those boots home, but unfortunately I had to leave them there and put my old stodgy professor shoes back on."

It was also gratifying to see that the rather glamorous magazine industry was interested in what she and her co-rock stars were doing in science, said Dr. Dawson.

"I couldn't agree more that we need people to understand what the world of science is all about and what we are accomplishing," she said. "I was also thrilled to see that this year they wanted to bring in female scientists to be Rock Stars of Science."

"Staggering" Increase in Autism

Dr. Dawson has been involved in autism research "for decades" — a claim that belies her youthful picture in *GQ*. "It was interesting to get a perspective on how much autism research has changed over the years, which we talked about during the *GQ* interview," she said.

When Dr. Dawson began her work in autism, it was thought to be extremely rare.

"Autism was considered to be so rare that we had grand rounds for the first child that I saw, a little boy, and by the time I left directing the autism center at the University of Washington, we literally had hundreds of children on our waiting list to be diagnosed. It's staggering, really, the change that has occurred over the last several years."

She says she is gratified that President Obama listed autism as 1 of the 3 major public health issues of the day, next to heart disease and cancer.

"There are so many children and adults now with autism, and yet we still know so little about what the causes are, the best treatments, and also how we are going to help all of the adults with autism become productive parts of our society."

Other "Roc Docs" appearing in the special issue of *GQ* are Alzheimer researchers Frank M. Longo, MD, PhD, from Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, Michael Weiner, MD, from the University of California, San Diego, who also heads the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative, and Eric M. Reiman, MD, executive director of the Banner Alzheimer's Institute and clinical director of the neurogenomics division at the Translational Genomics Research Institute in Phoenix, Arizona.

They were paired with Bret Michaels, former lead singer of the rock band Poison.

Other featured "Rock Doc" researchers in areas of cancer, heart disease, and other disciplines include the following:

Mehmet C. Oz, MD, cardiothoracic surgeon at New York Presbyterian Hospital, vice chair and professor of surgery at Columbia University, and Daytime Emmy Award-winning host of "The Dr. Oz Show."

Stephen B. Baylin, MD, cancer biologist and researcher in epigenetic therapy at the Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

Elizabeth H. Blackburn, PhD, discoverer of the enzyme telomerase and professor at the University of California, San Francisco.

Susan J. Blumenthal, MD, MPA, professor at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, and Tufts School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts, and former US assistant surgeon general, who worked with First Lady

Hilary Clinton to convince the Central Intelligence Agency, Pentagon, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration to make their advanced imaging technologies available to improve the early detection of breast cancer.

Catriona Jamieson, MD, PhD, a pioneer in stem cell research and hematologic cancer researcher at University of California, San Diego.

Emil Kakkis, MD, PhD, a physician scientist who develops treatments for rare genetic diseases and president of Kakkis Everylife Foundation.

Joan Massagué, PhD, researcher in cancer biology and genetics at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York City.

Charles L. Sawyers, MD, chair of the human oncology and pathogenesis program at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York City.

Phillip A. Sharp, PhD, academician, institute professor, Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge.

Craig B. Thompson, MD, president and chief executive officer of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Institute, New York City.

Mehmet Toner, PhD, professor of biomedical engineering at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, Boston.

Frank L. Douglas, MD, PhD, president and chief executive officer of Austin BioInnovation Institute and professor at the University of Akron, Ohio.

Bernard A. Harris, Jr., MD, physician, astronaut and venture capitalist, founder of the Harris Foundation, and chief executive officer and managing director of Vesalius Ventures.

#### Authors and Disclosures

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