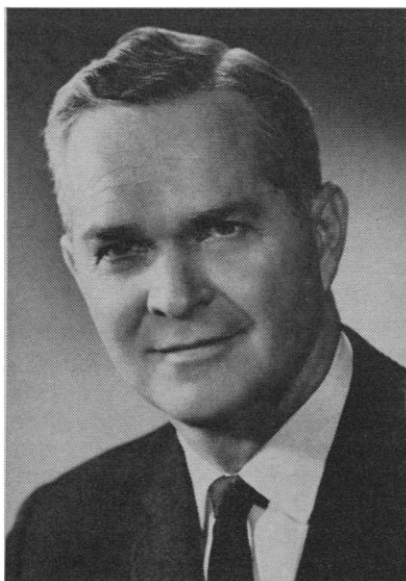


Robert Q. Marston To Head NIH

The year-and-a-half-long search for a suitable replacement for the highly respected James A. Shannon as director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) ended last week when the appointment of Robert Quarles Marston was announced. Marston, 45, is a relative newcomer to governmental administration; he became director of NIH's Division of Regional Medical Programs in early 1966 and was given another important assignment—Administrator of the Health Services and Mental Health Administration of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) on 1 April of this year. Marston's appointment to the NIH post came as something of a surprise since he had just been appointed to this other important HEW post. Having been swept rapidly upward in the government by these quick promotions, Marston facetiously commented, "I find as I look back over the last 3 or 4 years that I apparently am having increasing difficulty holding a job."

Shannon's position has been hard to fill for a variety of reasons. During his 13-year tenure, NIH has had a period of great prosperity, in terms both of funding and of the quality of its research. In the biomedical community, there was an intense desire to see a man of comparable ability replace Shannon, especially in this period of stress over the budget and mission of NIH. The NIH directorship is not a political appointment and does not require Senate confirmation; the NIH director is expected to remain for years regardless of change in administration. Perhaps the greatest dilemma of all, in trying to fill the NIH post, was the difficulty of balancing the demands of those primarily committed to NIH's research functions (like Shannon and the research community) and of those who want NIH to assume more responsibility for practical application and delivery of health care.

HEW Secretary Wilbur J. Cohen,



Robert Q. Marston

who appointed Marston, with the approval of the President, alluded to the difficulty of filling this position when he said, on 17 July, that Marston was not, in his view, the only man who could have filled the job at NIH but was the only qualified man he could find who would take the directorship with the approval of Shannon and his colleagues. Marston is highly regarded both by those primarily committed to a research role for NIH and by those (like health patron Mary Lasker) who want more attention given to practical application.

One reason why Marston is liked by the Lasker forces is because of his tactful administration of the controversial Regional Medical Programs in their first 2 years of operation. Cohen and other officials have complimented Marston on his administration of these programs on heart disease, cancer, and stroke. One of Marston's colleagues in HEW described him as "a man who doesn't have any enemies."

Marston's academic background will probably help him establish good relations with the medical schools which comprise an important part of NIH's constituency. For the 5 years

before he came to Washington, Marston was dean of the University of Mississippi School of Medicine. For most of the years from 1953 to 1961 he taught in the department of bacteriology and immunology at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, the institution from which he received his M.D. degree in 1947.

In recent years Marston has spent most of his time in medical administration rather than research. He did, however, study from 1947 to 1949, on a Rhodes scholarship, with Nobel prize winner Howard Florey at Oxford and was selected as a Markle Fellow in 1954.

Marston, now a sun-tanned, gray-haired man who speaks with a slight Southern accent, has spent most of his life south of the Mason-Dixon line. He was born in Toana, Virginia, and did his undergraduate work at Virginia Military Academy, his internship at Johns Hopkins University, and a year of residency at the Vanderbilt University hospital in Nashville. In 1958 he journeyed north for a year to teach at the University of Minnesota. Marston has served as chairman of the NIH International Fellowships Review Panel and did research at NIH, from 1951 to 1953, on the role of infection after whole-body irradiation, to fulfill his military obligation.

In a conference called to introduce Marston to the press, Secretary Cohen thanked Shannon for putting in "13 great years" as head of NIH and described NIH as "a brilliant jewel in the crown of HEW" which would continue to shine brightly under Marston's leadership when he assumes office on 1 September. After a period in which the biomedical research community has been filled with fear and trembling over the possibility of an unsuitable successor to Shannon, the position seems to have been filled by a man who pleases all the contentious constituencies of the National Institutes of Health.—BRYCE NELSON