This paper reported the discovery and isolation of the peptide we later called "vasoactive intestinal peptide" or "VIP." A 28-residue peptide chemically related to secretin and glucagon, it could increase organ blood flow, lower blood pressure, and augment cardiac output. (The presence of a vasodepressor principle in intestinal extracts had actually been noted by W.M. Said and E.H. Starling almost 70 years earlier, during their experiments leading to the discovery of secretin.) We isolated a highly vasoactive peptide and named it vasoactive intestinal polypeptide (VIP).

This name was not included in the Science report, which accounts for its absence from a computer printout on this peptide! Two subsequent papers, describing the purification procedure and the amino-acid sequence, were published in the European Journal of Biochemistry on condition that we used the more proper-sounding term, "octacosapeptide".

A few years after its isolation from the gut, VIP was rediscovered in the brain and in peripheral nerves. Its new and correct identity as a neuropeptide quickly replaced its earlier label as a candidate hormone of the gastrointestinal tract. Since then, interest in VIP has continued to grow, owing to its widespread occurrence in the human body as well as in the animal kingdom, its potent and varied biologic activities, and its potential importance as a neurotransmitter or neuromodulator in many organ systems.

Today VIP is widely viewed as a physiologic regulator of major body functions, including brain metabolism and blood flow, gastrointestinal motility and secretion, cardiovascular and respiratory function, neuroendocrine secretion, immune responses, and sexual activity and reproduction. Hypersecretion of VIP by certain tumors results in a distinct clinical entity, and VIP has been linked to several other diseases, including bronchial asthma, cystic fibrosis, and the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

The impact of the discovery of VIP is not yet fully realized, but it has already had an immense influence on my own career. The work leading up to this paper, and the continued research since then, has introduced me to several exciting disciplines previously alien to me: peptide biochemistry and pharmacology, endocrinology, gastroenterology, neuroscience, and, most recently, molecular biology. With that came valued new acquaintances and friendships with colleagues around the world.