William Charles Dement is the Lowell W. and Josephine Q. Berry Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford University School of Medicine, and the Division Chief of the Stanford University Division of Sleep.

A native of the state of Washington, Dement received his M.D. from the University of Chicago in 1955 and his Ph.D. in Neurophysiology from the same institution in 1957. While a medical student, he began his career in sleep research when he joined the lab of Dr. Nathaniel Kleitman. There, he helped discover and describe Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. From 1954 through 1957, Dement described the relationship between REM sleep and dreaming, established the all night sleep patterns in human beings, discovered REM sleep in animals and newborn babies, and demonstrated that the patterns of specific rapid eye movements are related to the visual experience of the dream.

In 1963, Dement joined the Psychiatry Department at Stanford University, where for the past thirty-five years he has continued his studies on the neurochemistry of sleep and the functional significance of the different sleep states. In 1964, Dement initiated a special narcolepsy clinic through which he demonstrated that the syndrome of narcolepsy involves disordered REM sleep processes. In 1970, Dement started the world's first Sleep Disorders Clinic which introduced all-night polysomnographic examination of patients with sleep-related complaints, medical responsibility and management of the patient, and objective assessment of the relationship between nighttime sleep and daytime function. For the latter, Dement developed the Multiple Sleep Latency Test which remains the standard diagnostic measure of daytime sleepiness. Dement and his colleagues were the first to understand the clinical implications and high prevalence of sleep apnea syndromes, periodic leg movement, narcolepsy, delayed sleep phase syndrome, psychophysiological insomnia, drug dependency insomnia, and a host of other disorders.
In 1973, Dement discovered narcolepsy in dogs and developed the world's only research colony of animals with this disease. This colony represents one of a handful of animal models of neurological disease in the world. Dement's basic research team has discovered and described neurochemical abnormalities associated with narcolepsy in dogs. Currently, the research is focusing on the biological clock—the overseer of all the body's many rhythmic processes—which is located in a single brain structure (the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN)) and can be kept alive in a dish, or transplanted from animal to animal. Dement's human research program elucidated sleep apnea and developed new and effective treatment strategies. Dement has conducted numerous studies on insomnia, circadian rhythms, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), jet lag, sleep loss, and sleep hygiene. Finally, Dement has helped develop a thorough understanding of the determinants of daytime sleepiness including the demonstration that partial sleep loss is cumulative, that the circadian curve of sleepiness is biphasic, and that sleep needs must be defined in terms of daytime alertness.

Dr. Dement was co-founder of the Sleep Research Society in 1961 and founding President of the American Sleep Disorders Association (ASDA) in 1975, a position he served for 12 years. During his Presidency, the ASDA grew from five sleep disorders centers with about twenty individual members to about 140 accredited centers with over 2,000 members.

Dement is the author or co-author of approximately 500 scientific publications, including the popular overview of sleep, Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep, the authoritative textbook for medical professionals, Principles and Practices of Sleep Medicine, and the Portable Stanford The Sleepwatchers.

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