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Two UC San Diego Scientists Honored for Schizophrenia Research

Two professors of psychiatry at University of California, San Diego School of Medicine have been honored by the New York City-based Brain & Behavior Research Foundation for their work studying the genetics, dysfunction and treatment of schizophrenia, a chronic and severe brain disorder affecting roughly 1 percent of the general population or approximately 3 million people.



David Braff, MD, and Gregory Light, PhD

David Braff, MD

David Braff, MD, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and director of the Schizophrenia Program at UC San Diego was named co-recipient of the 2014 Lieber Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Schizophrenia Research. The award includes a \$50,000 cash award, which will be shared with co-recipient Patrick F. Sullivan, MD, a professor of genetics and psychiatry at the University of North Carolina.

Braff, who is also director and lead scientist of the National Institutes of Health's Consortium on the Genetics of Schizophrenia, combines cross-species translational neurophysiological and neurocognitive measures with genetic and genomic tools to identify abnormal neural circuits and the brain architecture of schizophrenia; biomarkers of the disorder; and how best to create new psychosocial and pharmaceutical therapies.

“Dr. Braff has been at the forefront of research into the neurobiology of schizophrenia,” said Igor Grant, MD, FRCP(C) chair of the Department of Psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “His innovative work has opened a better understanding of the interplay of genetic and neurodevelopmental factors in the evolution of schizophrenia, as well as the promise of specific diagnostic markers that may help with early identification of people vulnerable to this disorder, at a time when preventive strategies may be most useful.”

Gregory Light, PhD

Gregory A. Light, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry and associate director of the UC San Diego Schizophrenia Program, is co-recipient of the 2014 Sidney R. Baer, Jr. Prize for Innovative and Promising Schizophrenia Research. He shares the prize with Stephan Ripke, MD, a statistical analyst with the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium, based at the University of North Carolina.

Light investigates the link between schizophrenia and abnormalities in how patients' brains process auditory cues. He and colleagues have developed a clinical test that could be used to help diagnose persons at risk for developing mental illness later in life. The Baer Prize comes with a \$40,000 cash award to be divided between the two recipients.

"Dr. Light's work opens the way to possibilities of retraining the brain in order to correct these difficulties in brain network cooperation," said Grant. "In addition to his outstanding scientific achievements, he also leads the Mental Illness, Research, Education and Clinical Center at the Veterans Affairs San Diego Healthcare System and is a wonderful colleague and teacher who is helping to develop a future generation of investigators to explore the bases of major mental disorders."

The Lieber and Baer prizes, announced this month, were two of five award categories honoring eight researchers in neuroscience and psychiatry. The recipients were selected by the Brain & Behavior Foundation's Scientific Council, comprised of 150 leading experts across disciplines in brain and behavior research, including two Nobel Prize winners, four former directors of the National Institute of Mental Health, 13 members of the National Academy of Sciences, 21 chairs of psychiatry and neuroscience departments at leading medical institutions and 47 members of the Institute of Medicine. They are considered among the most prestigious awards in the field of psychiatric research.

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