

UCSD Researcher Awarded One of First-Ever NIH New Innovator Awards

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Jing Yang, Ph.D., an assistant professor of pharmacology and pediatrics at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine, has been awarded a “New Innovator Award” by the NIH for her work to develop new approaches to studying how cancer cells metastasize to distant organs.



Jing Yang, PhD

“Novel ideas and new investigators are essential ingredients for scientific progress, and the creative scientists we recognize with NIH Director’s Pioneer Awards and New Innovator Awards are well-positioned to make significant – and potentially transformative – discoveries in a variety of areas,” said Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D., director of the NIH, in announcing the award winners at the NIH Director’s Pioneer Award Symposium in Washington, D.C. on September 19.

Innovative ideas by new scientific investigators like Yang have prompted Zerhouni, to make a major investment in the future of science. As one of 29 New Innovator Award recipients for 2007, Yang will receive \$1.5 million in direct costs over five years to support her work.

“Until recently, most fundamental studies of cancer biology focused on the earliest steps in tumor formation. However, the resulting primary tumors only rarely kill patients directly,” said Roger Y. Tsien, Ph.D., Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator and professor of Pharmacology at UCSD. “Most cancer deaths result from metastases, in which a tiny minority of primary tumor cells manages to spread widely throughout the body and establish widespread secondary colonies. Dr. Yang proposes to develop novel approaches to study those crucial disseminating ringleaders and find out what makes them so mobile and dangerous. We're delighted that the NIH has recognized such a promising young investigator with an exciting new strategy.”

The NIH has announced that a total of more than \$105 million will be awarded to 41 exceptionally innovative investigators – many of whom are in early stages of their research careers – as part of an NIH “Roadmap for Medical Research” initiative that tests new approaches to supporting research in the United States.

More than 2,100 applications were received for this extremely competitive program, which recognizes bold ideas from some of the nation's most innovative new scientists. In addition to the 29 “Innovator” awards, reserved for new investigators who haven’t received an NIH regular research grant before, the agency also awarded 12 “NIH Director Pioneer Awards,” given to support scientists at any career stage.

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