UC San Diego Health

Local Researcher Wins National Science Prize

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2*nd* *Annual Albert Szent-Györgyi Prize for Progress in Cancer Research* Awarded to Webster K. Cavenee, Ph.D.

The National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR) announced toda

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y that Webster K. Cavenee, Ph.D., has been awarded the 2nd Annual *Albert Szent-Györgyi Prize for Progress in Cancer Research*. Dr. Cavenee is director of the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research (LICR) San Diego Branch, professor of medicine and member of the Moores Cancer Center at the University of California, San Diego. Dr. Cavenee's research provided the first genetic evidence for the existence of tumor suppressor genes, one of the most influential breakthroughs in cancer research.

The annual *Albert Szent-Györgyi Prize for Progress in Cancer Research* was established to recognize outstanding scientific achievement in the war against cancer and to honor pioneering scientists who have made extraordinary contributions in the field of cancer research. The prize is designed to draw attention to the continued need to support basic cancer research and the role that it plays in new cancer therapies. The prize includes a $25,000 honorarium.

"Dr. Cavenee is a pioneer in the truest sense of the word. His research on tumor suppressor genes has not only advanced our understanding of cancer, but it also has provided valuable insight in the role that hereditary predisposition plays into developing cancer," said Dr. Harold Dvorak of Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital and chair of the *Szent-Györgyi Prize* Selection Committee.

"Dr. Cavenee's discoveries have helped to pave the way for researchers to better break down cancer's complicated molecular structures and understand the role that tumor suppressor genes play in cancer growth and development," said Dr. Sujuan Ba, co-chair of the *Szent-Györgyi Prize* Selection Committee and Chief Scientific Officer of
NFCR.

Dr. Cavenee's original research seeking to define the genetic lesions in retinoblastoma led to the first hard experimental evidence for the existence of tumor suppressor genes in humans. This breakthrough confirmed the "two-hit hypothesis," fundamentally altering the way scientists think about the onset of cancer and its progression. Today, mutations of tumor suppressor genes have been identified in more than half of all tumors, including those of muscle, melanocytes, kidney, prostate and breast. Novel gene therapies to reverse gene mutations or their effects in cancer cells hold promise as cancer treatment strategies which could be of benefit to cancer patients.

Today Dr. Cavenee is the director of the international LICR's largest branch (which is based at the University of California, San Diego), professor of medicine in the cancer biology program at UCSD, and a member of the Moores Cancer Center's Leadership Council. He is a fellow of the National Foundation for Cancer Research and has won many honors, including the Charles S. Mott Prize of the General Motors Cancer Research Foundation. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, a past-president of the American Association for Cancer Research, a Fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology, and serves on the editorial boards of several journals. He has also served on the board of both the Scientific Counselors of the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. Dr. Cavenee received his doctorate from the University of Kansas School of Medicine.

"The *Albert Szent-Györgyi Prize for Progress in Cancer Research* means a great deal to the cancer research field and I am humbled to have been selected by my peers to receive it. It is my hope that the discoveries I am being recognized for will have significant long-term impact on those patients who suffer from cancer around the world. That is the real prize," said Dr. Cavenee. "The support of the National Foundation for Cancer Research over the years, both for this prize and for basic cancer research, has been a vital part of many significant research discoveries."

The *Albert Szent-Györgyi Prize for Progress in Cancer Research* was established by the National Foundation for Cancer Research in honor of its co-founder, Dr. Albert Szent-Györgyi, recipient of the 1937 Nobel Prize for Physiology and Medicine for his study on vitamin C and cell respiration. Dr. Szent-Györgyi was a leading advocate for developing resources to provide scientists with the

financial support necessary to pursue novel cancer research ideas. In 1973, he changed the face of cancer research funding by co-founding the National Foundation for Cancer Research. Any scientist or individual may be nominated for the annual award by their peers and the winner is selected by a prize selection committee comprised of academic, scientific, business and non-profit leaders highly qualified to review and select the Prize winner.

The 2nd Annual Albert Szent-Györgyi Prize selection committee was chaired by the inaugural prize recipient: Harold Dvorak, M.D. Committee members were Sujuan Ba, Ph.D.; Yi Michael Wang, M.D., Ph.D., National Foundation for Cancer Research; Dennis Carson, M.D., University of California, San Diego; Stanley Cohen, M.D., Stanford University; Carlo Croce, M.D., Ohio State University; Richard Gaynor, M,D., Eli Lilly; Rakesh Jain, Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital; Thea Tlsty, Ph.D., University of California, San Francisco; Daniel Von Hoff, M.D., FACS, TGen and Arizona Cancer Center; and Bruce Zetter, Ph.D., Children's Hospital Boston.

About the National Foundation for Cancer Research

The National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR) was founded in 1973 to support cancer research and public education relating to earlier prevention, better diagnosis, new and more effective treatments, and ultimately cures for all types of cancer. NFCR promotes and facilitates collaboration among scientists to accelerate the pace of discovery from bench to bedside.

To date, NFCR has provided over $230 million in support of discovery-oriented basic research focused on understanding how and why cells become cancerous and on cancer prevention. NFCR's scientists are discovering cancer's molecular mysteries and translating these discoveries into therapies that hold the hope for curing cancer. NFCR is about Research for a Cure—cures for all types of cancer.

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