

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Media Contact: Bridgette Rose McNeill

214-648-3404

bridgette.mcneill@email.swmed.edu

MICROBIOLOGIST 13th UT SOUTHWESTERN FACULTY MEMBER ELECTED TO NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

DALLAS – May 2, 2000 – Dr. Eric Olson, chairman of molecular biology at UT Southwestern Medical Center, was elected today to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) – one of the highest honors attainable by an American scientist.

Olson, who is also director of UT Southwestern's Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Center for Basic Research in Cancer, is internationally recognized for his research into the genetic mechanisms of skeletal, cardiac and smooth-muscle cell proliferation and differentiation.

He is the 13th member of the UT Southwestern faculty elected to the academy. UT Southwestern now leads Texas medical schools in NAS members and matches UT Austin, the only state academic institution with 13 members.

"I'm thrilled and honored by this news and very surprised," said Dr. Olson. "This is wonderful recognition of my group. I have an incredible group of scientists working here with me."

"The entire faculty of UT Southwestern celebrates this acknowledgment of Eric Olson's scientific accomplishments," said Dr. Bill Neaves, executive vice president of academic affairs. "His success is a source of pride and satisfaction to everyone on campus and to all our friends and supporters in the Dallas community and throughout Texas."

Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern, said Olson's election is "one of the highest honors accorded a scientist and a tribute to his outstanding work in the field of developmental biology. This is an honor for UT Southwestern and testifies to the caliber of our research."

Olson, holder of the Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Distinguished Chair in Basic Cancer Research, studies basic regulatory mechanisms in developmental biology, including those that control formation of the heart and vasculature. Recently he and his collaborators made a breakthrough that may impact cardiac hypertrophy, or enlarged heart, which affects more than 5 million Americans. The scientists were able to block the formation of enlarged hearts in mice

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using the transplant reject drugs cyclosporin A and FK506. He and his colleagues discovered a molecular pathway leading to heart enlargement and tested their hypotheses by genetically engineering mice with congenital cardiac hypertrophy. The progression from cardiac hypertrophy to heart failure to death in those mice mirrored that seen in humans. *Clinical trials are expected to begin shortly.*

Olson, a native of Rochester, NY, joined the UT Southwestern faculty in 1995. He earned a bachelor of arts in chemistry and biology from Wake Forest University and a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Bowman Gray School of Medicine at Wake Forest University.

Olson was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1998 and has been recognized with multiple awards from the American Heart Association and other organizations for his work.

The NAS is a private, nonprofit society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific and engineering research. President Lincoln created the NAS in 1863 to act as an advisory board to the federal government on scientific and technical matters. Members are elected in recognition of their "distinguished and continuing achievements in original research."

Membership is comprised of approximately 1,900 members and 300 foreign associates, of whom more than 170 have won Nobel Prizes. New members and foreign associates are elected annually at the academy's annual meeting.

Other UT Southwestern faculty members who have been elected to the NAS and the year they were appointed are:

Ronald W. Estabrook, Ph.D., 1979; Michael S. Brown, M.D., 1980; Joseph L. Goldstein, M.D., 1980; Samuel M. McCann, M.D., 1983; Jean D. Wilson, M.D. 1983; Jonathan W. Uhr, M.D., 1984; Alfred G. Gilman, M.D., Ph.D., 1985; Roger H. Unger, M.D. 1986; A. James Hudspeth, Ph.D., M.D., 1991; David L. Garbers, Ph.D., 1993; Ellen S. Vitetta, Ph.D., 1994; and Johann Deisenhofer, Ph.D., 1997.

One other faculty member – Steven L. McKnight, Ph.D. -- was elected to the NAS in 1992 before he joined the UT Southwestern faculty.

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