

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Contact: Jennifer Donovan
(214) 648-3404

UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL SCIENTIST CHOSEN AS PEW SCHOLAR

DALLAS — June 30, 1995 — Dr. Miguel C. Seabra, assistant professor of molecular genetics at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, has been named a 1995 Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences.

He is one of 20 young scientists of exceptional promise chosen nationwide as Pew Scholars this year. Each will receive \$200,000 to help support his or her research over four years.

Seabra's research focuses on enzymes that activate a family of proteins whose function is to "direct traffic" in cells — to make sure other proteins end up where they belong.

Seabra is collaborating with Dr. Joseph Goldstein and Dr. Michael Brown, who shared the 1985 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine for their discovery of the underlying mechanism of cholesterol metabolism. Goldstein is chairman of molecular genetics at UT Southwestern. Brown is director of the Erik Jonsson Center for Research in Molecular Genetics and Human Disease.

Goldstein and Brown were Seabra's mentors during his work toward a doctorate in biochemistry and molecular biology, which he completed at UT Southwestern in 1992, and during a postdoctoral fellowship that followed.

During the course of this research, Seabra purified an enzyme known as REP. A mutation in REP has been identified as the cause of a hereditary disorder in which the retina of the eye degenerates, causing blindness by adolescence or young adulthood.

"We started out working on a basic mechanism that cells use to target proteins to their proper location and ended up understanding the underlying mechanism of a human disease," Seabra said. "This could lead to new treatments and a better understanding of the way the retina functions."

(MORE)

PEW AWARD — 2

Goldstein said: "Receiving this award is a terrific honor for Dr. Seabra and for this medical school. Funds from the award will allow a better understanding of the retinal blindness caused by a defect in REP."

A native of Portugal, Seabra earned a medical degree in Lisbon, where he also did a medical internship before coming to UT Southwestern to pursue his doctorate.

Pew Scholars are selected annually by The Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia. The monetary awards they receive are meant to encourage the young scientists to move forward in their research at a more rapid pace and in new directions that might not have been possible without additional support.

Two other UT Southwestern researchers are former Pew Scholars: Dr. Glen A. Evans, director of the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development, and Dr. Richard A. Padgett, senior research scientist in biochemistry.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is a national philanthropy that supports nonprofit activities in the areas of conservation and the environment, culture, education, health and human services, public policy, and religion.

###