

UT News

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May 7, 1986

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****Diabetes authority Dr. Roger Unger elected
to National Academy of Sciences

DALLAS--Dr. Roger Unger, diabetes researcher at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, was elected today to membership in the National Academy of Sciences.

A professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, Unger is the director of the Center for Diabetes Research at the health science center and is also the senior medical investigator at the Dallas Veterans Administration Medical Center.

Unger was named along with two other Texans--Dr. Ernst Knobil, professor of medical science and director of neuroendocrinology at the UT Health Science Center at Houston, and Dr. Gerard de Vaucauleurs, professor of astronomy at UT Austin. The three were among 59 members elected April 29 in Washington.

Unger becomes the eighth member of the Dallas health science center faculty to be elected to the National Academy of Sciences. Others include Nobel laureates Drs. Joseph L. Goldstein and Michael S. Brown; Dr. Ronald Estabrook; Dr. Samuel M. McCann; Dr. Jean D. Wilson; Dr. Jonathan Uhr, and Dr. Alfred Gilman.

Unger is known for his pioneering research in the role played by the hormone glucagon in diabetes. Until then, diabetes was considered a "unihormonal" disorder caused by the lack of insulin alone.

Although glucagon was discovered in 1923, its importance was not realized until Unger presented convincing evidence that blood glucose is regulated by glucagon in concert with insulin. He found that by correcting a diabetic's excess of glucagon, the blood sugar level can be brought back to normal or at least lowered.

Glucagon and insulin have opposite effects, Unger found. Glucagon raises blood sugar and insulin lowers it.

"In the diabetic there is improper regulation of blood sugar concentrations because the glucagon levels are too high and insulin is much too low. Our work indicates that unless you have both abnormalities, you don't get diabetes in its complete form," says Unger.

For his outstanding work, Unger has received numerous awards, including the Banting Medal, the highest scientific honor given by the American Diabetes Association.

The National Academy of Sciences is an organization of distinguished scientists and engineers concerned with the furtherance of science and its use for human welfare. Its congressional charter of 1863--signed by Abraham Lincoln--calls on the academy to serve as official adviser to the federal government, although it is not a government agency.

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