

Media Contact: Cliff Despres  
214-648-3404

[Cliff.Despres@utsouthwestern.edu](mailto:Cliff.Despres@utsouthwestern.edu)

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## **UT Southwestern scientists honored among best in Texas research**

DALLAS – Jan. 4, 2007 – UT Southwestern Medical Center's Dr. Zhijian "James" Chen and Dr. David Mangelsdorf were recognized today as two of the state's top rising stars in research by The Academy of Medicine, Engineering and Science of Texas (TAMEST).

Dr. Chen, professor of molecular biology, and Dr. Mangelsdorf, chairman of pharmacology, received Edith and Peter O'Donnell Awards from the academy at its annual conference in Austin. Each year, the awards honor three outstanding, up-and-coming researchers in science, medicine and engineering and their work. Each O'Donnell Award consists of a \$25,000 honorarium, a citation and an inscribed statue.

Dr. Chen received the award for science, and Dr. Mangelsdorf for medicine. Dr. Antonios Mikos of Rice University in Houston received the award for engineering.

"This honor recognizes the extraordinary accomplishments of Drs. Mangelsdorf and Chen, who clearly rank among the finest researchers in Texas and the nation," said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. "These awards also highlight UT Southwestern's unique success in attracting and nurturing some of the best and brightest minds in medicine and science."

The awards, first given last year, were named by TAMEST to honor two of the most generous and far-sighted supporters of Texas medical, engineering and scientific research and education. The Dallas couple, whose personal works and donations are made anonymously, is regarded in education, science and philanthropic circles as unsurpassed in their vision and import. Dr. Michael Rosen, professor of biochemistry at UT Southwestern, received the inaugural award for science in 2006.

Dr. Chen's research focuses on cellular signaling in the immune system, particularly by a protein called ubiquitin, so named because it is ubiquitously, or universally, found in cells.

Ubiquitin's best-known role is to tag other proteins ready for destruction. But Dr. Chen discovered a very different role for ubiquitin. He found that certain proteins in the cell, when tagged with ubiquitin, were activated instead of being destroyed. Once turned on by this chemical tag, proteins

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send signals inside the cell that help regulate cell growth and division, survival or death.

Dr. Chen currently studies how ubiquitin-based signaling affects cells in the immune system and has recently discovered a mitochondrial protein, known as MAVS, that also is critical for signaling immune response. His discoveries provide potential new targets for the development of novel therapeutics to fight off infection by common viruses such as hepatitis C, West Nile and influenza.

“This award is a tremendous honor, and it is a recognition of the work by a team of talented and dedicated students and postdoctoral researchers in my lab,” Dr. Chen said. “Very few states have this kind of prestigious recognition for scientists.”

Dr. Chen received his Ph.D. in 1991 from the State University of New York at Buffalo and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. He worked in industry before joining UT Southwestern in 1997.

Dr. Mangelsdorf, an internationally prominent researcher in lipid biology, has made major contributions to the understanding of the machinery that controls cholesterol metabolism.

His research focuses on nuclear receptors, proteins that turn genes on and off in the body.

He has discovered several new molecules, called ligands, that activate so-called orphan nuclear receptors. Dr. Mangelsdorf has determined the critical role these receptors and ligands play in the regulation of lipid and bile acid metabolism and the governance of cholesterol, which could lead researchers to the development of new drugs to fight high cholesterol and related diseases.

“To be recognized in this way, not only by your local colleagues, but statewide, is a great honor,” Dr. Mangelsdorf said. “This award not only highlights the great science being done in Texas, but also shows why UT Southwestern is a special place where scientists are given the opportunity and means to do research and be recognized for it.”

Dr. Mangelsdorf graduated from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff with a bachelor's degree in aquatic biology and chemistry. He earned his doctorate in biochemistry from the University of Arizona in Tucson and completed his postdoctoral studies at the Salk Institute for Biological Sciences. He joined UT Southwestern in 1993.

In addition to their position in the UT Southwestern faculty, Dr. Chen and Dr. Mangelsdorf serve

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as Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigators, as does Dr. Rosen.

The Academy of Medicine, Engineering and Science of Texas was launched in 2004 by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison to provide broader recognition of the state's top achievers in these fields, and enhance Texas' identity as a research leader. The academy also aims to foster the next generation of scientists and to increase awareness and communication among the state's up-and-coming minds about future priorities in research.

"James Chen and David Mangelsdorf are exemplary scientists whose achievements mirror the successes of UT Southwestern and our state," Sen. Hutchison said. "Their research has opened important new possibilities for fighting disease and developing new treatments. These awards are tributes to their accomplished work."

Academy members include the state's 11 Nobel Prize winners – four of whom are active faculty members at UT Southwestern – and the 200-plus Texas members of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Engineering and National Academy of Sciences.

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### **About UT Southwestern Medical Center**

UT Southwestern Medical Center, one of the premier medical centers in the nation, integrates pioneering biomedical research with exceptional clinical care and education. Its more than 1,400 full-time faculty members – including four active Nobel Prize winners, more than any other medical school in the world – are responsible for groundbreaking medical advances and are committed to translating science-driven research quickly to new clinical treatments. UT Southwestern physicians provide medical care in 40 specialties to nearly 89,000 hospitalized patients and oversee 2.1 million outpatient visits a year.

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