

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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WELCH FOUNDATION AWARDS NEARLY \$2 MILLION IN GRANTS TO 13 UT SOUTHWESTERN SCIENTISTS

DALLAS – July 25, 2003 – Thirteen scientists from UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas have received \$1.97 million in grants from the Welch Foundation, one of the nation's oldest and largest sources of private funding for basic chemical research.

In all, the foundation awarded \$22 million in three-year grants to 151 scientists representing 22 Texas institutions of higher education. Each research grant is renewable and provides a minimum of \$150,000 over a three-year time period.

Two UT Southwestern scientists – Dr. Philip Perlman, professor of molecular biology, and Dr. Elizabeth Goldsmith, professor of biochemistry – received \$160,000 grants from the foundation. Another 11 faculty members each received grants of \$150,000.

Dr. Perlman, holder of the John P. Perkins, Ph.D., Distinguished Professorship for Graduate Education, received funding to continue his studies of the tertiary structures of Group II intron ribozymes. Dr. Perlman is studying how ribonucleic acid – molecules that store genetic information – catalyzes chemical reactions.

“Much of our best research involves using chemistry to understand the basis for complex biological processes,” said Dr. Perlman. “Chemistry performed at the interface with biology is also key to drug development – a fact that makes the Welch Foundation grants vital to the future of medical research. I feel very fortunate to have benefited from the foundation's generosity and foresight.”

Dr. Goldsmith received a grant to continue her structural studies in the serpin inhibitory mechanism – a process by which serine proteases carry out irreversible conformational changes. Serpins undergo some of the most dramatic structural changes known to occur in proteins as they inhibit serine proteases.

“It is wonderful to get support for this small, but significant, research program,” said Dr. Goldsmith. “Protein chemistry research – structural biology, in general, and serpins, in particular – is really exciting for me, and it is particularly nice to be supported for a project that is so rewarding on both personal and professional levels.”

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Other UT Southwestern researchers receiving grants are: Dr. Ilya Bezprozvanny, associate professor of physiology; Dr. Steven Kliewer, professor of molecular biology; Dr. Mark Lehrman, professor of pharmacology; Dr. Yi Liu, assistant professor of physiology; Dr. David Mangelsdorf, professor of pharmacology; Dr. Michael Norgard, chairman of microbiology; Dr. Kim Orth, assistant professor of microbiology; Dr. Rama Ranganathan, associate professor of pharmacology; Dr. Philip Thomas, associate professor of physiology; Dr. Thomas Wilkie, associate professor of pharmacology; and Dr. Gang Yu, assistant professor in the Center for Basic Neuroscience.

Established in 1954 by the estate of Robert A. Welch, an oil and minerals entrepreneur, the Welch Foundation has contributed more than \$494 million to basic research in chemistry in the form of research and departmental grants, lectureships, special projects and awards.

“The Welch Foundation’s mission is to advance basic research in chemistry for the betterment of humankind, and its primary tool to achieve this is support for the talented chemists working at Texas institutions of higher education,” said Richard J.V. Johnson, chairman of the Welch Foundation. “Often used as seed money to explore new ideas and concepts, these grants are one of the most fundamental and effective ways that we can help the chemical research community find answers to some of the problems that plague mankind. We are happy to be able to support the academic community in this way.”

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