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# News

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\*\*\*Unger receives Koch Award.

DALLAS -- Dr. Roger Unger, professor of Internal Medicine at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, received the Endocrine Society's highest honor, the Fred Conrad Koch Award, at the 65th annual meeting June 9 in San Antonio.

The Dallas researcher was honored for his discovery that the hormone glucagon contributes to the development of diabetes. Before Unger's work, it was thought that diabetes resulted only from a lack of insulin. But he established that the disease is caused by both an insulin deficiency and an excess of glucagon.

The Endocrine Society citation said in part: "The bihormonal view of diabetes has revolutionized our understanding of the disorder. In addition, (Unger has) made significant contributions to the understanding of the role of gut hormones to normal and pathological states, has characterized the sequence by which glucagon is synthesized and made seminal contributions to the development of radioimmunoassay techniques."

The Koch Award, established in 1957 in honor of the biochemist who pioneered in the isolation of androgens, consists of a medal, a certificate and an honorarium of \$5,000. Another UTHSCD researcher, Dr. Samuel A. McCann, chairman of the Department of Physiology, received the award in 1979.

Since Unger and his co-workers showed that glucagon is involved in diabetes, they have also demonstrated that when glucagon levels are suppressed in diabetic patients by a hormone called somatostatin, the blood sugar levels drop dramatically.

Diabetics experience ups and downs in their blood sugar levels that insulin therapy alone does not correct. Normally, insulin turns food into usable glucose (sugar), and glucagon stimulates the liver to produce glucose that's needed between meals and during exercise. But in a diabetic, glucagon does not shut off. Even more sugar is pumped into the system, and this compounds the irregularity.

While a resident in medicine at Bellevue Hospital, Unger began a life-long interest in diabetes. During 1952 and 1953 while in the U.S. Public Health Service, he did a pioneering epidemiologic survey of diabetes that established the true frequency of the disorder.

In 1955 Unger received a joint appointment to the metabolism unit of the Dallas Veterans Administration Hospital and The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School. He is now a senior medical investigator at the Dallas Veterans Administration Medical Center in addition to his faculty position at the school. He has previously received the prestigious Claude Bernard Medal, the highest award given by the European Association for the Study of Diabetes; the first Solomon Berson Award given jointly by the International Diabetes Federation and the American Diabetes Association; both the Banting Medal and the Lilly Award of the American Diabetes Association; the David Rumbough Jr. Memorial Award for Scientific Achievement of the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation and the Veterans Administration's Middleton Award. He has received honorary doctorates from the University of Liege, Belgium, and the University of Geneva.

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