SOJTHWESTERN NEWS

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WANG RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AWARD IN MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

DALLAS – Jan. 16, 2004 – Dr. Xiaodong Wang, professor of biochemistry at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, has been awarded the prestigious National Academy of Sciences Award in Molecular Biology.

The honor, which includes a medal and \$25,000 prize, is given annually for a recent notable discovery in molecular biology by a young scientist. It will be presented April 19 in Washington, D.C., at the National Academy of Sciences' 141st annual meeting.

Dr. Wang was selected for the award on the basis of his biochemical studies of apoptosis, or cell death, a phenomenon in which cells activate a self-destruction program. As the body generates new cells, older cells must activate their self-destruction program. In the case of cancer cells, they are unable to maintain a balance and grow uncontrollably.

Dr. Wang joins Dr. Steven McKnight, chairman of biochemistry, and Dr. Thomas Südhof, director of the Center for Basic Neuroscience, as NAS molecular biology award recipients at UT Southwestern. Dr. McKnight was honored in 1991 with the award and was elected to membership in the NAS in 1992. Dr. Südhof was a 1997 co-recipient of the honor and in 2002 joined the NAS – membership in which is one of the highest honors attainable by an American scientist.

"Xiaodong Wang has single-handedly resolved the biochemical pathway responsible for the execution of programmed cell death," said Dr. McKnight. "His research represents the true essence of modern chemical research. I cannot think of any young scientist – worldwide – better qualified to receive this prestigious recognition."

Dr. Wang has discovered that several new proteins play a role in apoptosis, including cytochrome c. This protein is important for generating energy and maintaining life, and also is active in triggering apoptosis.

His continuing research could lead to treatments not only for cancer but also to therapies that include the biochemical manipulation of abnormal cells in neurological diseases, such as

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Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, and ultimately, the prevention of these diseases.

"I am very privileged and humbled to win this award, especially to be among so many great scientists that have previously won, including some of my colleagues," said Dr. Wang, holder of the George L. MacGregor Distinguished Chair in Biomedical Science and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator.

Originally from China, Dr. Wang obtained a bachelor of science degree in chemistry from Beijing Normal University before moving to the United States to attend graduate school at UT Southwestern. Following postdoctoral work here, he established his own laboratory as an assistant professor at Emory University School of Medicine in 1995. He was recruited back to UT Southwestern in 1996.

Dr. Wang's early research focused on messenger RNA splicing and later encompassed how human cells respond to cholesterol. He found that cells have a natural ability to balance out the levels of cholesterol production based upon the body's needs.

Among his other honors, Dr. Wang has received the Hackerman Award from the Welch Foundation, the Paul Marks Prize from the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, the Eli Lilly Award from the American Chemical Society, the Schering-Plough Award from the American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and the Young Investigator Award from the Society of Chinese Biomedical Scientists in America.

The NAS is part of The National Academies, along with the National Academy of Engineering, the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council. It is a private organization of scientists dedicated to furthering science and its use for the general welfare.

The NAS Award in Molecular Biology is supported by Pfizer Inc. and has been presented since 1962.

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