UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER NEWS

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UT Southwestern scientist honored among best in Texas research

DALLAS – Jan. 10, 2008 – Dr. Beth Levine, chief of infectious diseases at UT Southwestern Medical Center, was recognized today as one of the state's top rising stars in research by The Academy of Medicine, Engineering and Science of Texas (TAMEST).

Dr. Levine was named a recipient of one of four Edith and Peter O'Donnell Awards by the academy at its annual conference in Houston. Each year, the awards honor researchers in science, medicine, engineering and technology innovation whose work seems destined for international prominence at the highest level. Each O'Donnell Award consists of a $25,000 honorarium, a citation and an inscribed statue.

Dr. Levine received the award for medicine. Holder of the Jay P. Sanford Professorship in Infectious Diseases, she is a renowned specialist in the study of autophagy, the process by which cellular components are broken down to ensure optimal function.

Other 2008 O'Donnell Award recipients are Dr. Jennifer West of Rice University, for engineering; Dr. Edward Marcotte of UT Austin, for science; and Sameer Penharkar of Dallas-based Texas Instruments, for technology innovation.

"Dr. Levine's groundbreaking work has lead to new insights that have propelled forward many lines of medical research, including cancer, Alzheimer's disease and infectious diseases," said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. "She is one of the finest researchers in Texas and in the nation. This award recognizes her accomplishments and highlights UT Southwestern's continuing success in providing a nurturing environment for the best and brightest investigators."

The awards, first given in 2006, were named by TAMEST to honor two of the Lone Star State's most generous and far-sighted supporters of medical, engineering and scientific research and education. Previous UT Southwestern recipients of the award are: Dr. Michael Rosen, professor of biochemistry, who received the inaugural award for science in 2006; Dr. Zhijian "James" Chen, professor of molecular biology, the 2007 recipient for science; and Dr. David Mangelsdorf, chairman of pharmacology, the 2007 recipient for medicine.

"The O'Donnell Award is a tremendous honor that I share with the talented past and present

(MORE)

members of my laboratory," said Dr. Levine, who is an investigator in the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at UT Southwestern.

Dr. Levine's research team identified the first known mammalian gene involved in autophagy. Her investigations have shown that defects in the gene, called *beclin 1*, contribute to cancer, aging, neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's, infectious diseases and potentially to autoimmune disorders such as systemic lupus erythematosus.

"The ultimate goal of our research is to develop new drugs that will increase *beclin 1* expression and autophagy to help treat patients with diseases such as cancer, HIV and the herpes simplex virus," Dr. Levine said. "We also hope to understand better the role autophagy plays in protecting individuals from aging and from developing cancer and viral infections."

Dr. Levine earned her medical degree from Cornell University Medical College. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship in infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins Hospital and joined the UT Southwestern faculty in July 2004. A recipient of the American Cancer Society TIAA-CREF Award for Outstanding Achievements in Cancer Research, Dr. Levine was elected to membership in the American Society of Clinical Investigation in 2000 and the Association of American Physicians in 2006.

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.

Academy members include the state's 10 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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