

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## **UT Southwestern physician-researcher wins international award for lipid research**

DALLAS – Nov. 4, 2005 – Dr. Helen Hobbs, director of the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development and an investigator in the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at UT Southwestern Medical Center, has been awarded Germany's highly respected Heinrich Wieland Prize for her research on lipids.

The prestigious international science award is given annually to an individual who has conducted outstanding research in the fields of biochemistry, chemistry and physiology of fats and lipids and its clinical importance.

Dr. Hobbs' research focuses on the genetics of lipid metabolism, such as inherited factors that play a role in determining the level of low-density lipoproteins (LDL), or "bad" cholesterol, in the blood. High LDL cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease, heart attack and stroke because it contributes to the buildup of plaque that clogs the walls of arteries. Dr. Hobbs' research has shown, for example, that at least one out of every 50 blacks has a variation in one particular gene that results in a 40 percent-lower level of LDL.

The award is named after German chemist Dr. Heinrich Otto Wieland (1877-1957), who won the Nobel Prize in 1927 for his work on bile acids. Dr. Hobbs' work provides new insights on how cholesterol gets into bile, which is the major method used by the human body to eliminate cholesterol.

"Helen Hobbs is the poster child for physician scientists," said Dr. Michael Brown, Nobel laureate and director of the Erik Jonsson Center for Research in Molecular Genetics and Human Disease at UT Southwestern. In the 1980s, Dr. Hobbs spent four years following her clinical training as a postdoctoral research fellow in Dr. Brown and fellow Nobel laureate Dr. Joseph Goldstein's laboratory at UT Southwestern.

"An outstanding clinician, she launched her scientific career with Joe and me, and then she went ballistic. Her recent genetic work on human cholesterol-lowering mutations is the most important work in cholesterol metabolism since the discovery of the LDL receptor 32 years ago. The therapeutic implications are immense," said Dr. Brown, holder of the W.A. (Monty) Moncrief Distinguished Chair in Cholesterol and Arteriosclerosis Research and the Paul J. Thomas Chair in Medicine.

Dr. Hobbs will receive the award at a ceremony in Munich.

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"I am deeply honored to receive the Heinrich Wieland Prize," Dr. Hobbs said. "It represents not only a personal achievement, but also recognizes the outstanding contributions UT Southwestern researchers are making to the field of lipid biology. Amazingly, I am the fifth faculty member from this institution to receive this award."

Since the Heinrich Wieland Prize was first awarded in 1964, only the University of Heidelberg has had more recipients, with six.

Dr. Brown and Dr. Goldstein, chairman of molecular genetics, won the award in 1974 for their research on lipoprotein receptors and the genetic control of cholesterol metabolism. They shared the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine in 1985 for their discovery of the underlying mechanisms of cholesterol metabolism, which led to the development of statin drugs to treat high cholesterol.

Dr. John Dietschy, professor of internal medicine, received the Wieland Prize in 1983 for his research into the regulation of cholesterol balance in tissues.

Dr. David Mangelsdorf, professor of pharmacology and biochemistry, won the award in 2003 for his research focusing on the mechanisms of nuclear receptor proteins, which serve as sensors in protecting human cells against unusually high and possibly toxic levels of lipids, such as cholesterol and fatty acids.

Dr. Hobbs also directs the Donald W. Reynolds Cardiovascular Clinical Research Center at UT Southwestern, which includes the Dallas Heart Study, a multiyear, multimillion dollar project aimed at learning more about the hidden causes of heart disease and finding new treatments. She holds the Eugene McDermott Distinguished Chair for the Study of Human Growth and Development and the Dallas Heart Ball Chair in Cardiology Research. In 2004 she was elected to the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine.

Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern, said, "Dr. Hobbs is one of UT Southwestern's true leaders. The Heinrich Wieland Prize is a well-deserved recognition of her great accomplishments, and also a reaffirmation of UT Southwestern's role as home of the world's most outstanding group of scientists in the field of cholesterol and cardiovascular disease."

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