

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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TWO UT SOUTHWESTERN RESEARCHERS RECEIVE TOP PHARMACOLOGY AWARDS

DALLAS – April 13, 1998 – Two of the highest honors in pharmacology will be presented to UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas researchers, one whose investigations uncovered how the egg and the sperm communicate and one who discovered a potent blood-pressure-raising hormone.

The American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET) will present the 1998 Goodman and Gilman Award for Receptor Pharmacology to Dr. David Garbers and the John J. Abel Award to Dr. Masashi Yanagisawa at an April 18 ceremony in San Francisco. This is the third time that a UT Southwestern faculty member has won the Goodman and Gilman honor and the second consecutive year an investigator from the institution has won the Abel award.

Garbers, professor of pharmacology, Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) investigator and holder of the Patrick E. Haggerty Distinguished Chair in Basic Biomedical Science, is known for his work in cell communication, particularly in the field of egg and sperm attraction. His investigations revealed a new family of receptors, the guanylyl cyclases. His continuing study of these cell-surface molecules is uncovering significant information about regulation of blood pressure, congenital blindness and gastrointestinal function—including a leading cause of the diarrhea responsible for a high rate of infant mortality in Third World countries.

"I'm very honored to be included in such a distinguished group but particularly honored to receive an award named after Al Gilman's father and his father's best friend," Garbers said, referring to UT Southwestern chairman of pharmacology, Dr. Alfred Gilman, winner of the 1994 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine winner and recipient of the 1990 Goodman and Gilman Award. "Louis Goodman and Alfred Gilman were pioneers and giants in pharmacology."

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Goodman and the late Gilman wrote *The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*, a landmark book on the field, that has been called the "blue bible" of the science. The award, established in 1980, is funded by SmithKline Beecham.

The John J. Abel Award recognizes a young scientist under age 39 who has distinguished himself by original, outstanding research in pharmacology. Yanagisawa, professor of molecular genetics and an HHMI investigator, is credited with discovering endothelin, a blood pressure-raising hormone secreted by cells in the inner lining of blood vessels. His discovery spurred pharmaceutical companies to find drugs to block the hormone's action, and clinical trials are now under way.

In the process of studying endothelin, Yanagisawa serendipitously discovered the genetic basis of a congenital intestinal disorder called Hirschsprung's disease—also known as megacolon—which affects one in 5,000 babies.

"To be chosen for this award was totally unexpected but a very rewarding recognition for our work," Yanagisawa said of the honor supported by Eli Lilly and Co. and first presented in 1947. "I am grateful that the pharmacology society believed that our research ranks so highly in the biomedical sciences."

Abel was the first president of ASPET. He became the first chairman of the Johns Hopkins Medical School Department of Pharmacology in 1893 when he was 36 and continued his research until his death at age 81 in 1938.

The other two previous UT Southwestern winners of these awards were Dr. Ellion Ross, pharmacology professor and holder of the Greer Garson and E.E. Fogelson Distinguished Chair in Medical Research, who received the 1996 Goodman and Gilman award, and Dr. David Mangelsdorf, associated professor of pharmacology and HHMI investigator, who received the 1997 Abel Award.

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