UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER NEWS

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Pioneering diabetes research earns UT Southwestern scientist state's top honor for medicine

DALLAS – Jan. 12, 2012 – Dr. Philipp Scherer, director of the Touchstone Center for Diabetes Research at UT Southwestern Medical Center, was recognized today as a rising star in Texas research by The Academy of Medicine, Engineering and Science of Texas (TAMEST).

Dr. Scherer, professor of internal medicine and cell biology at the medical center, is one of four winners of the 2012 Edith and Peter O'Donnell Awards presented by TAMEST.

Each year, the awards honor outstanding achievements by early-career investigators in science, medicine, engineering and technology innovation. Each award consists of a $25,000 honorarium, a citation, a trophy and an invitation to speak at the conference.

Dr. Scherer has directed the Touchstone Center since 2007. He received the O'Donnell Award in medicine based in part on his research into fat-derived hormones that control sensitivity to insulin. The blood levels of adiponectin – a protein he discovered in 1994 – decline as a person gains weight, which offers potential as a good predictor of diabetes, heart disease and cancer risk.

"This is a reflection of all the outstanding collaborators that I have had the privilege to work with over the years, as well as a tribute to the exceptional metabolism group here at UT Southwestern," Dr. Scherer said. "I am deeply honored to get this award."

The award selection committee cited Dr. Scherer's research on fat cells called adipocytes and their impact on body energy homeostatis, inflammation and cancer. The committee noted Dr. Scherer's discovery of how fat cells communicate with other tissues and regulate the release of their hormones. Adiponectin, for instance, is secreted almost reciprocally with another fat-derived hormone, leptin.

In 2007, Dr. Scherer found that excess adiponectin in mice can prompt fat tissue to expand in a healthy, non-inflamed way, thereby generating the "world's fattest healthy mice" resistant to development of diabetes.

"Fat tissue remains one of the most enigmatic tissues we have. It fulfills an essential role in storing excess calories, yet too much of it increases our risk to develop diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer," Dr. Scherer said. "We hope that our efforts highlight new avenues of how we can maintain

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proper function of fat cells, while still allowing them to effectively absorb the excess of toxic lipids that we expose ourselves to in our daily diet."

Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky, president of UT Southwestern, said, "Dr. Scherer's research contributes to our understanding of the molecular mechanisms of how fat cells communicate with organs and may lead to new ways of fighting diabetes and other obesity-related diseases."

Dr. Roger Unger, professor of internal medicine and former Touchstone Center director who nominated his UT Southwestern colleague, called Dr. Scherer a leader in diabetes and obesity research whose "innovative approaches have created new avenues of investigating disease causes."

Dr. Scherer, who joined the UT Southwestern faculty in 2007, earned a bachelor's degree in biology as well as a doctorate in biochemistry from the University of Basel in Switzerland. He completed postdoctoral training in cell biology at the Whitehead Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge.

The author of more than 200 publications, Dr. Scherer received the Outstanding Scientific Achievement Award of the American Diabetes Association in 2005. He has served on review panels at the National Institutes of Health, received numerous visiting professorships and given named lectures at national and international institutions.

Other 2012 O'Donnell Award winners are Dr. Michael Deem of Rice University for engineering; Dr. Karl Gebhardt of UT Austin for science; and Dr. Ted Moise of Texas Instruments for technology innovation.

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