

ANU MEDIA RELEASE

News from The Australian National University

THURSDAY 16 MARCH 2006

CURTIN MEDAL RECOGNISES EPILEPSY RESEARCHER

A neurologist who has helped many people by discovering an underlying cause of epileptic seizures, Professor Samuel Berkovic, has been awarded the 2005 Curtin Medal for outstanding contribution to Australian medical science.

Professor Berkovic, who heads the Comprehensive Epilepsy Program at the Austin Hospital and the Epilepsy Research Centre at the University of Melbourne, has shown that mutations in single genes encoding neuronal membrane channels were a cause of epileptic seizures.

He and his collaborators discovered eight of the twelve known genes in which mutation is associated with idiopathic epilepsies. These discoveries have revolutionised basic scientific research into epilepsy.

The John Curtin School of Medical Research (JCSMR) awards the Curtin Medal annually to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to medical science and is an Australian citizen, or an Australian resident, or a person whose work has significant Australian relevance.

The medal can be awarded for either a major discovery or for lifetime achievement in medical research. The 2004 Curtin Medal was awarded to the University of Queensland's Professor Ian Frazer, the 2006 Australian of the Year.

A statement from the Curtin Medal awards committee said Professor Berkovic was an internationally renowned neurologist and clinical researcher with strong collaborative links to basic scientists.

Professor Berkovic and his teams' clinical and molecular insights have emphasised the importance of genetic factors in causation of epilepsies. His work has also led to an application of inheritance patterns in families that has made clinical diagnosis more accurate and has enabled more precise genetic counselling and treatment advice.

JCSMR Director, Professor Judith Whitworth, said Professor Berkovic was an innovative and inspirational scientist.

"Professor Berkovic's work has helped thousands of people in Australia and internationally who have epilepsy. His work has addressed some of the mysteries that have surrounded epilepsy for centuries. He inspires us all to look to develop new and innovative ways to combat known illnesses."

Professor Berkovic said he was honoured to receive the medal.

"I am in distinguished company when you look at past winners. It is very good for my group and department to see their work being recognised. The John Curtin School is the premier academic school in Australia and to be recognised by them is very flattering."

Professor Berkovic will be presented with the Curtin Medal at the John Curtin School of Medical Research at 4pm today.

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