

Canberra researcher honoured for tackling major unsolved medical problem

Professor Chris Goodnow, from the John Curtin School of Medical Research in Canberra, has been awarded the 2005 Commonwealth Minister's Award for Excellence in Health and Medical Research. The Award is in recognition of Professor Goodnow's pioneering research to apply molecular genetics to reveal critical mechanisms protecting our body against autoimmune diseases such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and systemic lupus.

Professor Goodnow and his team's research has changed our understanding of how the immune system acquires "self-tolerance" to the normal components of our body through a series of regulatory checkpoints as immune cells mature. The discovery of these checkpoints has stimulated clinical efforts to induce or restore tolerance in adults during transplantation, allergy and autoimmunity.

"Rapid advances in gene technology are enabling us to understand our genes deal with lifestyle and environmental stresses and which gene products are good targets for new drugs to prevent or cure common diseases," said Professor Goodnow. "In the last few years, we have used this technology to focus on the immune system. Our studies have begun to reveal the key genes and biochemical circuits regulating self-tolerance and autoimmune disease. Development of rational strategies for prevention and cure of autoimmune diseases is the next step."

Professor Goodnow is the Director of the Medical Genome Centre at the John Curtin School of Medical Research. The pioneering success of the centre in establishing genome-wide mutagenesis in the mouse led in 2002 to the award of an Australian Government Major National Research Facility grant to establish the Australian Phenomics Facility in Canberra, with Goodnow as Director. He is also a founder and chief scientific officer for Phenomix Corp, a biotechnology start-up company with operations in San Diego and Canberra.

ASMR President, A/Professor Bronwyn Kingwell said "Chris Goodnow is an inspiring figure and role model for young scientists by successfully tackling major unsolved medical problems from an Australian base through pursuit of ambitious, groundbreaking research strategies, energetic communication, and by balancing basic research with development of the biotechnology industry. We are delighted that Professor Goodnow has received this honour."

The Hon Julie Bishop MP will present the 2005 Commonwealth Minister's Award on behalf of Tony Abbott, at the ASMR Medical Research Dinner® in Melbourne June 9.

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