

Media Release – June 5, 2009

ASMR Medalist, PROFESSOR JOSEF PENNINGER

Speaking at the ASMR MRW® Gala Dinner in Perth (Convention Centre)

Tuesday June 5, 2009

"Genetic research and biotechnology have entirely revolutionised our world and will be the key driving force of wealth and industries in the coming centuries"

Professor Josef Penninger is the Scientific Director of the Institute for Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria and the ASMR Medalist 2009.

The main focus of his work is on heart/lung, autoimmune, cancers and bone diseases, **producing a steady stream of groundbreaking** studies across the breadth of immunology

Branded a chronic underachiever by his teachers as a youngster, **Josef Penninger made the list of the 10 most cited scientists in the world two years in a row**, was named as one of the 10 most promising scientists in all fields of science, and recently the Austrian Scientist of the Year

Born in Austria in 1964, he studied medicine, immunology and the history of arts in Innsbruck. Professor Penninger believes the keys to his success are passion, intellectual curiosity and determination.

*An enthusiastic believer in innovation, he attributes equal importance to an interdisciplinary approach to science.* Professor Penninger has strong views on how scientists should be educated, funded and encouraged to retain the awe, amazement and fun of discovery!

He believes the European Research Council's Framework 7 Program is the best thing to ever happen to European research. He said, *"It is a commitment to research which brings prestige for people and governments and, adds to the scientific output for the benefit of all. It is a template for funding which fosters collaborations and is extremely powerful."*

Public funding, Penninger believes, should invest in basic science and allow most translational research to be left to the big companies who have the money to develop the basic findings.

#### **Just one of Penninger's research highlights relates to Autoimmune Diseases**

In autoimmune diseases such as multiple sclerosis and diabetes, people's white cells can attack their own bodies. Prof Penninger's research team identified a molecular gatekeeper known as "Cbl-b" that permits these white cells to still attack infections, but not their own body (Bachmaier et al., *Nature*, 2000; Krawczyk et al., *Immunity*, 2000; Jeon et al., *Immunity*, 2004). Recently his group could show that Cbl-b control rejection of cancer cells by the own immune system (Loeser et al. *JEM* 2007), that is Cbl-b could be use to activate the immune system to kill tumors.

#### **Interview opportunities!**

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