FOUNDATION FOR THE NIH AWARDS LURIE PRIZE TO RUSLAN M. MEDZHITOV FOR GROUNDBREAKING DISCOVERIES IN THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Lurie Prize Honors Young Scientists and their Contributions to Biomedical Research

**Chicago, IL** (May 15, 2013) - The Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH) awarded the first annual Lurie Prize to Ruslan M. Medzhitov, PhD, David W. Wallace Professor of Immunobiology at Yale University School of Medicine and Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator, last evening at a ceremony at the Robert H. Lurie Medical Research Center of Northwestern University. Dr. Medzhitov was recognized for seminal discoveries related to the innate immune system, the human body’s first line of defense against invading organisms which cause infection.

The evening included remarks by Dr. Charles Sanders, MD, Chairman of FNIH; Dr. Maria Freire, PhD, President of FNIH; Ms. Ann Lurie, global philanthropist; and Dr. Eric Neilson, Vice President for Medical Affairs and the Lewis Landsberg Dean at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. The Honorable John Porter, Vice Chairman of FNIH and former US Congressman from Illinois, served as the evening’s host and master of ceremonies. Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the NIH, made a special appearance via video.

In accepting the award, Dr. Medzhitov said, “It is an incredible honor to receive this award. I would like to thank Ms. Lurie for her vision and generosity, the members of the extraordinary scientific jury who have been my role models for many years and the FNIH for their continuous support and dedication.”

A jury of eminent scientists headed by Solomon Snyder, MD, Department of Neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University, selected Medzhitov, 46, for the honor from a group of 154 nominees. The annual prize honors early-career researchers whose findings have advanced basic biomedical science. The award carries an honorarium of $100,000.
In laying out the rationale for granting the award, Snyder said Medzhitov discovered and characterized a class of proteins called Toll-like receptors that recognize and facilitate the immune response to toxic proteins. The innate immune system rapidly mobilizes a response to infection and, together with the adaptive immune system, is crucial to protecting human health.

Born in Tashkent in the former Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, Dr. Medzhitov studied biology and biochemistry when financial resources for scientific research were scarce. While poring over single copies of medical journals, he discovered an article by Dr. Charles A. Janeway, Jr. that sparked his interest in immunology and eventually led to a fellowship in the U.S. and current professorship in immunobiology at Yale University, in New Haven, Connecticut.

The Lurie Prize was established by well-known, global philanthropist Ann Lurie, a member of the Board of Directors of FNIH. It reflects Ms. Lurie’s passion for advancing biomedical research and medical care. Her significant financial commitments have launched and benefited research and development, as well as patient care programs at the University of Michigan, Northwestern University, the recently-dedicated Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago and health initiatives in Kenya, China and Rwanda.

The Lurie Prize recognizes young scientists, defined as individuals under the age of 52, who have made paradigm changing contributions to biomedical research. The prize, presented by the FNIH, is an important example of the foundation’s activities in support of biomedical research and in promoting and facilitating public-private partnerships.

“This inaugural Lurie Prize bestowed tonight recognizes the critical importance of young, talented scientists like Dr. Medzhitov who are in the prime of their research careers,” said Dr. Sanders. “The FNIH is thankful for Ann Lurie’s unwavering commitment to promoting investment in biomedical research and patient care, with particular focus on children.”

For more information on Dr. Medzhitov’s discovery and the Lurie Prize, please visit: www.fnih.org.

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