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Brain & Behavior Research Foundation to honor nine scientists with Outstanding Achievement Prizes

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The Brain & Behavior Research Foundation will honor nine scientists with its 2015 Outstanding Achievement Prizes for their work in schizophrenia, mood disorders, child and adolescent psychiatry, and cognitive neuroscience. The awards will be presented on October 23rd at the Foundation's National Awards Dinner and celebrate the transformative power of neuroscience and psychiatric research to improve the lives of people with mental illness, which affects one in four people.

According to Foundation President and CEO Jeffrey Borenstein, MD, the Outstanding Achievement Prizes in five categories are among the most prestigious awards in the field of psychiatric research. The recipients were selected by the Foundation's Scientific Council, which comprises 162 leading experts across disciplines in brain and behavior research, including two Nobel laureates; four former directors of the NIMH; 13 members of the National Academy of Sciences; 21 chairs of Psychiatry and Neuroscience Departments at leading medical institutions; and 47 members of the Institute of Medicine.

"We are delighted to highlight the work of these outstanding scientists who are dedicating their careers to unravelling the complexities of psychiatric disorders in order to improve the lives of millions of people and their families," said Dr. Borenstein. "We applaud the accomplishments of the 2015 Outstanding Achievement Prizewinners and look forward many future discoveries."

The 2015 Outstanding Achievement Prize winners are as follows:

The Lieber Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Schizophrenia Research

The Lieber Prize was established in 1987 by Constance E. Lieber, Foundation President Emerita and her husband, Stephen A. Lieber, Chair of the Foundation's Board of Directors.

Robert Freedman, MD, Chairman, Department of Psychiatry, and Superintendent, Colorado Psychiatric Hospital, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver, CO and Editor-in-Chief, American Journal of Psychiatry.

Dr. Freedman's pioneering research examines the convergence between physiology and genetics in schizophrenia. Under his leadership, investigators at the Institute for Children's Mental Disorders, which he co-founded in 1999, have discovered genetic variants that affect the risks for serious psychiatric illnesses, including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. These findings have led to new investigational treatments, currently in FDA-approved trials, for the treatment of schizophrenia in adults, and for administration to pregnant women and their newborn children to prevent abnormalities in early brain development that may lead to mental illness later in life.

Patrick McGorry, MD, PhD, FRCP, FRANZCP, Professor of Youth Mental Health, University of Melbourne, Australia and Executive Director, Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health.

Dr. McGorry's research is credited with shifting the therapeutic paradigm for schizophrenia to early detection and intervention in young people, and he has led the international development of evidence-based therapies with controlled trials which demonstrate significant reduction in progression to full psychosis in clinically high-risk subjects. He has also helped transform mental health services for vulnerable young people with his advocacy for the Australian government-funded National Youth Mental Health Foundation (headspace). Dr. McGorry is now embedding the study of biomarkers and genomics in his cohort and clinical trials. His goal is to provide clinicians with clear and reliable evidence to help young people with emerging psychosis achieve maximum recovery.

The Colvin Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Mood Disorders Research

Established in 1993 the prize was re-named in 2012 to honor longtime Foundation supporter, the late Oliver D. Colvin, Jr., who bequeathed the largest single contribution in the Foundation's history.

Michael Berk, MBBCh, MMed, FF (Psych) SA, PhD, FRANZCP, Alfred Deakin Professor of Psychiatry at Deakin University and National Health and Medical Research Council Senior Principal Research Fellow.

Dr. Berk's work looks at the effects of oxidative stress and inflammation in depression, bipolar disorder and their medical comorbidities, and focuses on finding novel therapeutic approaches. In placebo controlled trials, Dr. Berk found that N-acetyl cysteine (NAC), a drug available from health food stores, was effective for patients with bipolar depression and negative symptoms in schizophrenia. This discovery has opened new therapeutic pathways for the treatment of bipolar disorder, drug addiction, and other major psychiatric illnesses, and brought a practical and readily available new drug into clinical therapeutics. Most recently, he completed the first positive large scale trial of internet psychotherapy for bipolar disorder, the largest trial of Vitamin D in a community cohort, and the first two randomized placebo controlled trials of NAC in both depression and bipolar disorder maintenance treatment.

L. Trevor Young, MD, PhD, FRCPC, Dean of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine and Vice Provost, Relations with Health Care Institutions.

In studying the molecular basis of bipolar disorder and its treatment, Dr. Young has focused on the processes that lead to long-term changes in brain structure and function, and how mood-stabilizing drugs can alter those changes. Dr. Young and his lab found increased oxidative damage in the anterior cingulate cortex of patients with bipolar disorder along with a frontal cortical deficit in the natural anti-oxidant glutathione. He found that lithium increases an enzyme critical to the synthesis of glutathione and increases the neuroprotective factor BDNF which he also found decreased in the brain. This work has revealed a fundamental role of mitochondrial dysfunction and oxidative stress in bipolar disorder, yielding these abnormal pathways as new targets for future therapeutics.

The Ruane Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Research

The Ruane Prize was initiated in 2000 by philanthropists Joy and William Ruane, and recognizes significant advances in research toward the understanding and treatment of early-onset brain and behavior disorders.

BJ Casey, PhD, the Sackler Professor of Developmental Psychobiology and Director of the Sackler Institute at Weill Cornell Medical College and adjunct professor, The Rockefeller University.

Dr. Casey is a world leader in human neuroimaging and its use in typical and atypical development. By performing brain imaging studies of ADHD and anxiety in relation to genetic risk factors, she examines developmental transitions across the life span, especially during the period of adolescence, performs translational studies and develops models for mental health problems that affect millions of young people. Her studies have begun to inform when and how to target treatments to the individual based on age and genetic profile. Dr. Casey's goal is to reduce mental illness in young people by finding effective treatments targeted to the biological state of the developing brain. Her work has major implications for juvenile justice and mental health policy reform.

Francisco Xavier Castellanos, MD, Brooke and Daniel Neidich Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Professor of Radiology and Neuroscience at NYU Langone Medical Center, Director of the Center for Neurodevelopmental Disorders at the NYU Child Study Center, and Director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Research, Nathan Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research.

For the past 25 years Dr. Castellanos has focused on understanding the neurobiology of ADHD by applying neuroimaging-based approaches and by collaborating on molecular genetic studies. He has studied brain development in healthy and hyperactive children, and is particularly interested in the study of brain circuitry and the use of large populations to develop norms for future clinical studies. Dr. Castellanos was an early advocate of examining low-frequency fluctuations in brain function and in behavior, both of which have become mainstream lines of investigation and are now being used in autism research. After founding his own laboratory at NYU Langone Medical Center in 2001, he began focusing on periodic spontaneous activity of brain functioning and was among the first researchers to focus on dysfunctional brain circuitry in developmental disorders.

The Goldman-Rakic Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Cognitive Neuroscience

The Goldman-Rakic Prize was created by Constance and Stephen Lieber in memory of Patricia Goldman-Rakic, a neuroscientist renowned for discoveries about the brain's frontal lobe, who died in an automobile accident in 2003.

Amy F. T. Arnsten, PhD Professor of Neurobiology at the Yale University School of Medicine and a member of the Kavli Institute of Neuroscience at Yale.

For more than 25 years, Dr. Arnsten's lab has studied the physiology, structure and function of the primate

prefrontal association cortex (PFC) in order to develop new treatments for cognitive disorders. Her research suggests that the molecular mechanisms that evolved in primate cortex to enhance mental flexibility confer vulnerability when there is loss of regulation due to genetic or environmental insults. Dr. Arnsten's research has led to the use of new treatments for cognitive disorders, including guanfacine (IntunivTM), approved by the FDA for the treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder-- which is also used off-label to treat a broad spectrum of prefrontal disorders-- and prazosin, a compound which protects the prefrontal cortex from the deleterious effects of stress in animals, and is used in patients, veterans and active duty soldiers with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The Sidney R. Baer, Jr., Prize for Innovative and Promising Schizophrenia Research

The Sidney R. Baer, Jr. Prize has been awarded since 2005 and is funded by the Sidney R. Baer, Jr., Foundation. The prize honors exceptional young scientists selected by this year's Lieber Prizewinners.

M. Camille Hoffman, MD, MScS, Assistant Professor in the Departments of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Psychiatry, and Women's Reproductive Health Research Scholar, at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, and a practicing Maternal Fetal Medicine sub-specialist at the affiliated safety net hospital, Denver Health Medical Center.

Dr. Hoffman's research into the fetal origins of mental illness, including schizophrenia, ADHD and autism, seeks to understand how positive and negative factors in human pregnancy influence maternal health, and critical periods of fetal and early childhood brain development based on evidence that some neurodevelopmental disorders manifest decades after a trajectory of abnormal brain development begins in utero. Dr. Hoffman has championed a partnership between the obstetrics and psychiatry departments, and modeled new methods of fetal ultrasound, fetal physiology, and in utero stress hormone exposure to directly assess the mechanisms by which these factors contribute to an increased risk of fetal programming of mental illness. Her goal is to find pregnancy interventions that will improve maternal-child mental health outcomes for women and their children.

Barnaby Nelson, PhD, Associate Professor and Director of the Ultra High Risk for Psychosis research program at Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health and the University of Melbourne.

Dr. Nelson's work focuses on identification strategies, prediction of outcome and treatments for young people who are at ultra-high risk for psychosis. His research looks at the pre-onset or prodromal phase of psychotic disorders, with a particular interest in integrative models across phenomenological, clinical, neurocognitive and neurobiological domains. He has a particular interest in self and world experience in schizophrenic spectrum, cognitive biases and the role of stress and trauma in the onset of psychosis, and personality and resilience factors. During his career, Dr. Nelson has led the publication of landmark studies on the prediction of transition to psychosis.

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