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Dr. Benjamin Neale awarded Leena Peltonen Prize for Excellence in Human Genetics

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The Leena Peltonen Prize for Excellence in Human Genetics was established in winter 2010 to recognize scientists who are in the early phases of their independent careers. The second award ceremony will take place at the University of Helsinki, Finland, on March 3, 2016.

The recipient of the second prize is Dr. Benjamin Neale who is awarded for his contributions in developing statistical genetics and applying these methods to cracking the genetics of neuropsychiatric diseases.

The prize is funded by the Leena Peltonen Memorial Fund in the Paulo Foundation. It includes an award of €10 000. An international nomination committee consisting of faculty members of the Wellcome Trust Leena Peltonen School of Human Genomics selects the winner. This year, the committee received nominations for 10 candidates from members of the Human Genomics research community.

"Among all the excellent candidates, Ben Neale clearly stood out for his diverse talents, enthusiasm and scientific contributions," said Prof. Manolis Dermitzakis (University of Geneva), director of the Leena Peltonen School of Human Genomics and chair of the selection committee.

Dr. Neale started his career at King's College in London, where he received his Ph.D. in Human Genetics in 2009. After his post-doctoral training in statistical genetics at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in the laboratory of Mark Daly, he established his own research group and is now an assistant professor in the Analytic and Translational Genetics Unit at MGH, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, and an Institute Member of the Broad Institute.

Neale's research focuses heavily on the development and application of statistical genetic methodology. He has contributed to the development of popular genetic software tools and led the design of the exome chip, a genotyping array that captures rare coding variation in a cost-effective manner.

Neale has analyzed large-scale genetic data from many different complex diseases but is especially focused on neuropsychiatric diseases, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and schizophrenia. He leads the ADHD Genetics Initiative at the Broad Institute and MGH, a collaborative effort that focuses on genomic studies of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In addition, he is an active member of the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium and leads key consortium-wide efforts in genotyping and analysis.

"Ben is a uniquely talented individual - combining a keen intellect with qualities of leadership and scientific judgment that are well beyond his years," said Professor Mark Daly (Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital and The Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard), Neale's postdoctoral mentor and a long-term colleague. "It is an enormous personal and professional pleasure to see how he has so rapidly developed into a leading thinker - and doer - in genetics."

"That he has chosen to focus his incredible talents, not for his own personal gain, but rather on collaborative scientific endeavors to understand and combat devastating psychiatric disease speaks volumes about Ben. His personal qualities, as well as his scientific acumen, make him an incredibly appropriate choice for a prize that honors the spirit of the late Leena Peltonen," said Daly. "I cannot think of a more suitable choice at all levels."

The Leena Peltonen Honorary Lecture in Human Genetics is given by Professor Nelson Freimer during the award ceremony in Helsinki on March 3.

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