Exceptional contribution to the advancement of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases recognized at ECCMID

Prof. Robert A. Bonomo received the ESCMID Award for Excellence in Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases 2016 for his outstanding lifetime contribution to the field of antimicrobial resistance.

XX April 2015, Amsterdam: The European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) announced the winner of its 2016 excellence award at its annual congress, the 26th European Congress of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ECCMID) taking place in Amsterdam.

Prof. Robert A. Bonomo, Chief of Medical Service at the Cleveland Veteran Affairs Medical Center in Ohio, Director of the Geriatric Research Education & Clinical Center of the Veterans Integrated Service Network, co-Chair of the Gram-Negative Committee of the Antibiotic Resistance Leadership Group, and Vice Chairman of Veterans Affairs of University Hospitals Case Medical Center, received the ESCMID Award for Excellence in Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases 2016. This award is the most prestigious prize given at the annual congress each year and recognizes an outstanding lifetime contribution to the field of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Prof. Bonomo is being recognized by ESCMID for his research, teaching, mentoring and over 340 publications all of which have greatly enhanced science, particularly in the field of antibiotic resistance. His primary research efforts focus on structure-function relationships of clinically important beta-lactamases using microbiological and biochemical testing, medicinal chemistry, structural biology, pharmacological analyses, genetics and molecular epidemiology. Prof. Bonomo and his team have participated in the evaluation of many preclinical and clinical drug candidates, including the testing of four novel antimicrobial agents which progressed to phase III clinical trials, which have won regulatory approval, now FDA approved) as well as over 100 other beta-lactamase inhibitor candidates.

The award was given at the 26th ECCMID in Amsterdam by Prof. Murat Akova, ESCMID President, and Prof. Mario Poljak, ESCMID President-elect, on Sunday, 10 April 2016. During this ceremony he gave a recipient’s keynote lecture on the renaissance of the beta-lactamase inhibitors, explaining the strategic design of these newer compounds is absolutely critical. He added: “high affinity of the active site is important, but the closer to the active site an inhibitor gets, the more likely it is that inhibitor resistance will occur.”

Prof. Bonomo predicted that new boronic acid compounds are going to arrive in the clinic and that 3rd generation diazabicyclooctanes (DBC), that are more potent and active, could potentially make a substantial difference.

However, he finished by warning that resistance is going to become more common and that new extended-spectrum beta-lactamases (ESBLs) are going to emerge. To overcome this, researchers will need to explore new approaches and tools, alongside beta-lactamase inhibitors and further study the mechanism’s basic protein science.
At ECCMID 2016, a number of young scientists were also honoured for their contributions to the research and medical community. The ESCMID Young Investigator Awards for Research in Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases acknowledge excellence in research, and stimulate further study of the highest scientific level.

Due to the large number of excellent applications this year, ESCMID decided to give the award again to three researchers: infectious disease specialist Dr Sanne Jespersen (Aarhus, Denmark) and clinical microbiologists Dr Robert P. Ryan (Dundee, Scotland) and Dr Timothy M. Walker (Oxford, England). The ceremony was followed by the award recipients’ lectures.

Dr Jespersen explored optimal HIV treatment in extremely resource-poor and politically unstable countries, applying the tools of science under difficult circumstances. Dr. Ryan looked at the role interspecies signalling plays in influencing both bacterial virulence and response to therapy in various polymicrobial infections. And, Dr Walker’s research focused on how whole-genome sequencing of Mycobacterium tuberculosis can better guide public health investigations into tuberculosis outbreaks, and how genomic mutations can predict phenotypic drug susceptibility.

Finally, the ESCMID TAE Awards for Training Achievements rewarded outstanding trainees in clinical microbiology and infectious diseases. This year, two trainees, Dr Clíodhna Ní Bhuachalla (Dublin, Ireland) and Dr Luís Filipe Gomes Malheiro (Porto, Portugal) were honoured.

Presenting the awards was Prof. Annelies Zinkernagel, ESCMID Scientific Affairs Officer, who commented: “In creating the Excellence and Young Investigator Awards, ESCMID is bringing exemplary scientific contributions and the rising stars of tomorrow to the attention of the microbiology and infectious disease community. Prof. Bonomo’s work spans three decades, and it is hard to think of anyone else who has made such an outstanding contribution to field. As a result, the new beta-lactamase inhibitors, that are likely to be present in the clinic in the next few years, represent a really exciting development in overcoming resistance.

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