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Dr Inder Verma chosen for Cozzarelli and Vilcek prizes



Dr Inder Verma

The Indian Star News Service

Posted: Monday, February 18, 2008, 03:50 pm EST

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New York: Eminent Indian-American scientist Dr. Inder Verma has been selected for two prestigious awards in biomedical science: Vilcek Prize and Cozzarelli Prize.

One of the world's leading authorities on the development and use of engineered viruses for gene therapy, Dr. Verma is an American Cancer Society Professor of Molecular Biology in the Laboratory of Genetics at The Salk Institute

in La Jolla, California.

Dr Verma won the 2007 Cozzarelli Prize for his paper titled "Targeted Delivery of Proteins across Blood-Brain barrier" in the prestigious journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The award would be presented to him in April.

The Vilcek Foundation Prizes, consisting a cash award of \$50,000 and a commemorative trophy, are awarded annually to foreign-born individuals for extraordinary contributions to society in the United States. The prize recipient for the arts is composer Osvaldo Golijov.

The award will be presented to Dr. Verma during The Foundation's third annual awards dinner on March 26 at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in New York.

In explaining the motivation for the awards, Dr. Jan T. Vilcek, President of The Vilcek Foundation said, "We should not have to be reminded of how much America owes to people who were born abroad, but we do. Historically, the United States has innumerable foreign-born individuals to thank for establishing it as a leader in the sciences and arts, and in many other fields as well. In awarding The Vilcek Foundation Prizes, our primary objective is to raise awareness of that reality. We should not forget that so much of what this country takes credit for is the achievement of immigrants."

Born in India, Dr Verma received a master's degree from Lucknow University, and a Ph.D. from The Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovoth, Israel.

After postdoctoral study at MIT in the laboratory of the Nobel laureate David

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Baltimore, he joined the faculty of The Salk Institute at age 26.

Dr. Verma's major research interests are cellular genes whose alteration can cause cancer and the development of techniques for gene therapy. Dr. Verma's group created a vector, or carrier, that is now used worldwide for gene delivery. The genetically engineered virus is used to insert new genes into cells in a test tube; the cells can then be returned to the body, where they produce an essential protein that the body is missing.

Dr. Verma's group is also studying two genes implicated in familial breast cancer, BRCA1 and BRCA2, and recently demonstrated that their action is linked to the cell's division cycle and that BRCA1 regulates gene activity.

When the field of biotechnology was in its infancy, the Government of India invited Dr. Verma to join a task force charged with the goal to position the country as a leader in biotechnology. Dr. Verma has traveled to India every year for the past 37 years; he has lectured there on the topic of gene therapy, visited many institutions and advised a number of colleagues, young investigators and students.

For his many outstanding accomplishments, Dr. Verma was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and as a Foreign Fellow to the National Academy of Sciences, India.

Dr. Verma was also elected to the Third World Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Philosophical Society.

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