Two leading scientists were today announced as the winners of the 2009 Roche Awards for Translational Neuroscience.

Dr Alcino Silva, Professor of the Departments of Neurobiology, Psychiatry and Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, was given the Senior Award for his outstanding work on molecular and cellular cognition.

Dr Eric Morrow, currently an instructor in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, was given the Junior Award for his findings on the genetics of autism.

“Both winners of the Roche Awards for Translational Neuroscience have changed the way we think about key neurodevelopmental disorders,” said Dr Luca Santarelli, Global Head of CNS Clinical Research and Exploratory Development at Roche. “Thanks to their outstanding work, we are closer to understanding the molecular mechanisms that contribute to the pathophysiology of these diseases enabling us to translate preclinical findings into potential medicines for patients suffering from severe neurological disorders.”

The awards recognise established and emerging investigators in the field of translational neuroscience, who have made a major contribution to the understanding of neurodevelopmental disorders.

About the Award Winners

Dr Alcino Silva received the Senior Award for his research in molecular and cellular cognition. His laboratory at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is focused on deriving explanations of cognitive processes that integrate molecular, cellular and behavioural mechanisms and to find treatments for cognitive disorders.

Recently, his team has shown that it is possible to reverse conditions associated with neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1) and tuberous sclerosis two of the most common genetic disorders that cause learning disabilities.

Dr Silva was the founding President of the Molecular and Cellular Cognition Society, an international organisation of more than 2,000 members and 100 laboratories across America, Europe and Asia, which emphasises the integration of molecular and cellular patterns of behaviour.

He completed his postdoctoral studies with Nobel Prize winner Susumu Tonegawa at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). From MIT, Dr Silva went to the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in 1992, where he had a leading role in developing the field of molecular and cellular cognition. Dr Silva was also recently awarded Portugal’s Order of Prince Henry for contributions to molecular and cellular cognition.

Dr Eric Morrow, winner of the Junior Award, is a junior faculty member in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. This Spring he will join the faculty at Brown University Institute for Brain Science where he will be Assistant Professor of Biology and Psychiatry.

His most recent work, published in Science last year, traced a diverse range of genetic mutations in autism and supported the
concept of defective regulation of gene expression as the common mechanism of the disorder³.

Dr Morrow received his SB from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in molecular biology and his MD magna cum laude from Harvard Medical School in the MIT-Harvard Division of Health Science and Technology. He also earned a PhD in Genetics from Harvard University and completed his clinical training in psychiatry at McLean Hospital and the MGH, where he was the Chief Resident in Psychopharmacology. During his training he received several awards including the NIMH Outstanding Resident Award and the Thomas P. Hackett Award for research accomplishment and promise. His most recent genetics research has been mentored by Dr. Christopher Walsh, a neurogeneticist at Harvard Medical School. Dr Morrow is actively involved in genetics research with a focus on the genes that regulate cognitive and brain development.

About the Awards

The winners were selected by the Scientific Organisers of the 2009 Roche-\textit{Nature Medicine} Translational Neuroscience Symposium, whose members include Dr Thomas R. Insel, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institutes of Health, USA and Dr Gerald D. Fischbach, Scientific Director of the Simons Foundation, USA.

The symposium, focused on autism and other developmental brain disorders, was held at Roche’s conference centre in Buonas, Switzerland from 17–18 April at which the winners received their prizes.

The event featured the leading academics, scientists and clinicians from the world of neuroscience, including Dr Anthony Bailey (University of Oxford / Autism Research, UK); Dr Mark Bear (Picower Institute / MIT, USA); Dr Thomas Bourgeron (Institut Pasteur, France); Dr Jamel Chelly (Institut Cochin, France); Dr Geraldine Dawson (Autism Speaks, USA); Dr Petrus de Vries (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust, UK); Dr Randi Hagerman (University of California - Davis M.I.N.D. Institute, USA); Dr Thomas Insel (NIMH / NIH, USA); Dr Roberto Malinow (University of California - San Diego, USA); Dr Jeffrey Neul (Baylor College of Medicine, USA); Dr Morgan Sheng (Genentech, USA); Dr Alcino Silva (University of California - Los Angeles, USA); Dr Matthew State (Yale University School of Medicine, USA); Dr Thomas Südhof (Stanford University, USA); Dr Christopher Walsh (Harvard Medical School, USA) and Dr Stephen Warren (Emory University, USA).

It is the second time the symposium has been held. The first, held in 2006 in California, focused on developments in neuro-psychiatry.

“‘This was an extraordinary and intimate meeting where some of the greatest thinkers in neuroscience today came together to share their insights and experience,’’ said Juan Carlos Lopez, Chief Editor, Nature Medicine, co-organizer of the Symposium.

For more information on the event, go to:

http://www.nature.com/natureconferences/tns2009/index.html

About Roche

Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Roche is one of the world’s leading research-focused healthcare groups in the fields of pharmaceuticals and diagnostics. As the world’s biggest biotech company and an innovator of products and services for the early detection, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, the Group contributes on a broad range of fronts to improving people’s health and quality of life. Roche is the world leader in in-vitro diagnostics and drugs for cancer and transplantation, and is a market leader in virology. It is also active in other major therapeutic areas such as autoimmune diseases, inflammatory and metabolic disorders and diseases of the central nervous system. In 2008 sales by the Pharmaceuticals Division totaled 36.0 billion Swiss francs, and the Diagnostics Division posted sales of 9.7 billion francs. Roche has R&D agreements and strategic alliances with numerous partners, including majority ownership interest in Chugai, and invested nearly 9 billion Swiss francs in R&D in 2008. Worldwide, the Group employs about 80,000 people. Additional information is available on the internet at www.roche.com.

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REFERENCES


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