Six Doctors Receive Clinician Scientist Awards

Six medical doctors received the Clinician Scientist Awards (CSAs) for 2009, adding to the growing pool of clinician scientists (doctor-researchers) in Singapore to drive translational and clinical research development here. These researchers, who hold dual appointments as medical doctors, will examine clinical questions about diseases in basic research laboratories in order to improve patient care.

First introduced in 2004, the award provides between three and five years of research funding and salary support to clinician scientists working in public hospitals and national disease centers. Under the scheme, the clinician scientists will spend at least 70% of their time conducting research relevant to their areas of specialty and the remaining to see patients. This enables them to stay in touch with medicine and at the same time, explore and expand new research grounds by bringing insights from their clinical work to the laboratories.

The award has two categories: Senior Investigator (SI) and Investigator (Inv). The former caters to senior doctors who are already actively involved in highly productive research and hold at least one peer-reviewed active research grant. They will be funded for a period of five years under the scheme. The Inv category caters to younger doctors with the potential of becoming independent investigators and who wish to develop a career in translational and clinical research.

Joining the cohort this year are specialists from various backgrounds including cancer, infectious disease, endocrinology and obstetrics & gynecology.

The CSA award is part of the overall talent development program under phase II of Singapore’s Biomedical Sciences (BMS) Initiative. Coupled with good research infrastructure and institutional support, this program aims to provide the clinician scientists with a conducive environment for medically relevant research that will one day translate into better healthcare delivery for Singapore patients.

Said Mr Lim Chuan Poh, Chairman of Singapore’s Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) and Co-Chair of the BMS Exco, “The Exco would like to extend its heartiest congratulations to this year’s awardees. Our clinician scientists play a very important role in bringing together the research and healthcare communities in Singapore. We are excited by the diverse fields of expertise of this year’s awardees, and look forward to further building up our pool of clinician scientists to create new knowledge and improved healthcare solutions that benefit the society.”

On the importance of translational and clinical research (TCR), Ms Yong Ying-I, Permanent Secretary (Health) and Co-Chair of the BMS Exco said, “Our experience in the most recent encounter with H1N1 is a prime example on the importance of linking scientific research with healthcare. Areas that
the clinician scientist award recipients are tackling such as obesity, gastric and nasopharyngeal cancers, are diseases that afflict many Singaporeans. Scientific information and new breakthroughs allow healthcare providers to react and respond adequately and efficiently in the interest of our patients. Singapore’s clinician scientists will continue to play the important role in bridging the clinical and scientific aspects of diseases.”

The selection of the CSA awardees is based on the scientific merit of their research proposals and their track records. Close to 30 awards have been given out since 2004. The CSA is funded by the National Research Foundation and administered by the National Medical Research Council of MOH.

The CSA scheme funds 100% of the Clinician Scientists salaries to the host institutions. These funds may be used by the institutions to employ another clinician to take over the clinical duties of the CS, hence freeing up their time for research. CSs still spend 30% of their time seeing patients.

About the Biomedical Sciences Initiative
The BMS Initiative was launched in June 2000 to develop BMS as a key pillar of Singapore’s economy, alongside Electronics, Engineering and Chemicals. To achieve this, the BMS Initiative is led both by a Steering Committee on Life Sciences, comprising the Ministers for Trade & Industry, Health and Education, chaired by Chairman NRF; and an Executive Committee (EXCO), chaired by the Chairman of A*STAR and the Permanent Secretary for Health. The EXCO draws on the combined experience of renowned scientists in Singapore’s BMS International Advisory Council (IAC) for strategic advice and guidance.