



Chen Elected to NAS Membership

April 29, 2014

To the UT Southwestern Community:

Please join me in congratulating our colleague Zhijian “James” Chen, Ph.D., Professor of Molecular Biology and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator, on his election, which was announced this morning, to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), one of the highest honors attainable by a scientist.

Dr. Chen has been a pioneer in deciphering the mechanisms of cell signaling, inflammation, and innate immunity – the body’s first, generalized response to infection. Early in his career, he uncovered a new, unexpected role for ubiquitin, a small protein, showing that it activates other proteins important to growth regulation and other essential cellular functions.

In other work, he found that the cell’s energy-producing bodies, the mitochondria, contribute to the body’s immune response and identified MAVS, the first beneficial prion found in humans.

His recent discoveries have provided profound new insights into cellular responses to viral infection and may pave the way for more effective treatments. His work has revolutionized our understanding of fundamental cellular mechanisms of disease and has revealed new targets for drug development to fight infection by common viruses such as hepatitis C, West Nile, and influenza.

Dr. Chen holds the George L. MacGregor Distinguished Chair in Biomedical Science as a member of the Department of Molecular Biology. He also is a member of UT Southwestern’s Center for the Genetics of Host Defense.

With Dr. Chen’s election, UT Southwestern Medical Center now has 21 members of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences on its faculty. This number gives UT Southwestern the distinction of being among the top group of leading academic medical centers with the most NAS members.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.
President, UT Southwestern Medical Center