

LifeSciences

Insight

THE € 100 MILLION WOMAN

Kirsten Drejer, CEO, Symphogen

"What really drives me is developing new drugs that can make a genuine difference"

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First Brain Prize to be awarded

By Chris Tachibani

For the first time this year, an annual prize of 1 million euro will be awarded for outstanding European research in the field of neuroscience. The Grete Lundbeck European Brain Research Foundation announced in May 2010 that it will reveal the first winners of the Brain Prize, as it will be called, in March 2011.

Dr Nils Axelsen, MD, DMSc, chief consultant at the National Serum Institute in Denmark, chair of the foundation's board of directors says:

"The Grete Lundbeck European Brain Research Foundation was established by the Lundbeck Foundation for the sole purpose of awarding this prize and creating opportunities for Danish researchers to interact with the prize winners. We wanted to develop a major, prestigious European neuroscience prize awarded completely independently of the commercial interests of the Lundbeck Foundation."

For that reason, the Grete Lundbeck European Brain Research Foundation was established as a trust with money from the Lundbeck Foundation, but with the majority of the board of directors being independent of the Lundbeck Foundation.

"The selection committee contains prominent international scientists in the field, and the board of directors will not be involved in evaluating the candidates. The field of neuroscience was chosen because it is an extremely important and complex field, ranging from fundamental neurobiological research to investigating diseases of the brain and nervous system, such as Alzheimer's, depression and schizophrenia," Axelsen adds.

Comparisons with the Nobel Prize

Comparisons with the Nobel Prize are inevitable. Like the Nobel Prize, the Brain Prize is a personal award and the winners can use the award money without restrictions. It is about the same amount as the Nobel Prize, since a Nobel Prize winner takes home 10 million SEK, around 1 million euro, depending on the exchange rate. Unlike the Nobel Prize, the list of candidates does not come from selected, invited nominators. Anyone can make a Brain Prize nomination through the foundation's website, except for members of the Lundbeck Foundation, the board of directors and the selection committee; self-nomination is not allowed. The Nobel Prize is truly international, but the Brain Prize is meant to stimulate European research, so it is restricted to scientists who have made significant contributions to European neuroscience.

"Winners should have at least 10 years of active research ahead, to give them extra recognition and stimulus while they are still active. A special feature of the Brain Prize is the possibility of awarding it to a group of researchers, since modern research increasingly requires collaboration," Axelsen says.

Inspire international collaboration

Dr Anne-Marie Engel, Director of Research for the Lundbeck Foundation and board member of the Grete Lundbeck European Brain Research Foundation, says:

"Brain Prize winners will show creativity and boldness in the kind of questions they ask and the issues that



Board of Directors of Grete Lundbeck European Brain Research Foundation. From the left: Niels Axelsen, Ralf Henningsen, Lauritz Holm-Nielsen, Anne-Marie Engel, Jens Oddershede, Jens Frederik Rehfeld, Anders Björklund

Photo: Lundbeck

drive their research. It's also important that they are aware of the potential impact their research has on patient treatment and diagnosis."

In her opinion the Brain Prize will increase awareness of Danish contributions to neuroscience and inspire international collaboration. To help fulfill the long-term goal of boosting Danish neuroscience research through increased connections, the Brain Prize winner will participate in events with neuroscience groups at Danish universities such as lectures, master classes and meetings with research groups and potential collaborators. By building networks with leading European neuroscientists, the Brain Prize hopes to help increase scientist exchanges and attract more international researchers to Danish neuroscience.

Professor Gitte Moos Knudsen of the of Copenhagen University works on brain imaging, particularly for studying specific neurotransmitter systems. She is also president of the Danish Society for Neuroscience, so she represents some of the scientists who will potentially benefit from interacting with the first Brain Prize winners. She says the outreach programme is very promising, and she looks forward to the meetings, with ensuing discussions and potential scientist exchanges. The Brain Prize has an impact beyond just research.

"The Brain Prize will certainly generate increased at-

S The Lundbeck Foundation

T The Lundbeck Foundation supports Danish research to the tune of DKK 400 million a year and has recognised outstanding research with prizes such as the Nordic Research Prize and awards for young scientists. The Nordic Research Prize will be discontinued, by introducing the Brain Prize.

tention for neuroscience from the public. Brain disorders are a special area in the sense that the people who suffer from those disorders are less able to advocate their case precisely because of their disorder. In addition, brain disorders are stigmatised. For those reasons we need initiatives like the Brain Prize," says Professor Gitte Moos Knudsen.

An official award ceremony for the first Brain Prize will be on 2 May 2011, at the Royal Danish Library, the Black Diamond, in Copenhagen. ■

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