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The first Sjöberg Prize, totalling 1 million US dollars, is awarded for discoveries that have led to new and effective cancer treatments

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has decided to award the Sjöberg Prize 2017 to

James P. Allison, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, USA and

Tony Hunter, Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, CA, USA

“for groundbreaking studies of cellular processes that have led to the development of new and effective cancer drugs”

The Sjöberg Prize is an annual international prize in cancer research that is now being awarded for the first time. The prize is financed by the Sjöberg Foundation, and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences is responsible for selecting the Laureates. The foundation was founded in 2016 by the late businessman Bengt Sjöberg, who donated 2 billion Swedish krona, one of the biggest donations in Swedish history.

“We are delighted that we can encourage future cancer research by awarding this prize to two such outstanding researchers. Their discoveries have led to improved cancer treatment for thousands of people and we are proud to be awarding them the first Sjöberg Prize. Their high-quality research represents the Sjöberg Foundation’s idea and purpose of inspiring and aiding new efforts in the work to fight cancer,” says the donor’s brother, Ingemar Sjöberg, Chairman of the Sjöberg Foundation.

The prize totals 1 million US dollars and is shared equally between the Laureates. It is divided into a personal award of 100,000 US dollars and a grant for future research of 900,000 US dollars.

This year, the research being rewarded has opened up two entirely new ways of treating cancer.

James Allison investigated how the white blood cells known as T cells are activated, and how a specific “brake” signal could be prevented. He realised that when this brake is removed, the immune system can use its full potential to attack tumour cells. These discoveries have resulted in the cancer pharmaceuticals that are called immune checkpoint inhibitors and which are of decisive significance in treating melanoma. They are also used in treating other forms of cancer and numerous clinical trials are underway.

“I am honored and humbled to be a recipient of the first Sjöberg Prize, and feel that it acknowledges the effort of all those who worked to translate fundamental understanding of immunological processes into treatment strategies that are saving the lives of many cancer patients,” says James Allison.

James P. Allison was born in 1948 in Alice, Texas, USA. He is professor and Vivian L. Smith Distinguished Chair in Immunology at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, Texas, USA.

Tony Hunter studied how normal cells become tumour cells, demonstrating that a special process was necessary: tyrosine phosphorylation. His discovery led to the development of a new type of cancer pharmaceutical, tyrosine kinase inhibitors. These have revolutionised the treatment of chronic myeloid leukaemia (KML) and are of also great benefit in other forms of cancer.

“I am deeply honoured to have been recognized by the inaugural Sjöberg Prize. It is very gratifying that our work on a simple chicken tumour virus has ultimately led to new and effective therapies for human cancer, with 26 tyrosine kinase inhibitor drugs currently approved for clinical use,” says Tony Hunter.

Tony Hunter was born in 1943 in Ashford, Kent in the United Kingdom. He is an American Cancer Society Professor and Renato Dulbecco Chair, and Deputy Director of the Salk Institute Cancer Center at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, California, USA.

The award ceremony will be during the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences’ Annual Meeting on 31 March 2017 in the presence of His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen of Sweden. The laureates will hold open lectures at Karolinska Institutet on 30 March.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences was founded in 1739 and is an independent organisation that aims to promote the sciences and strengthen their influence in society. The Academy takes special responsibility for the natural sciences and mathematics, but strives to increase the exchange between different disciplines.

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