


# **16<sup>th</sup> Annual Merit-NIH National Veterinary Scholars Symposium**

**“Solving Complex Challenges at the Interface of  
Humans, Animals and their Environment”**

**July 30 - August 2, 2015  
Davis, California**







Overview: Over 600 participants attended the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Merial-NIH Symposium at the campus of UC Davis, California, hosted by the College of Veterinary Medicine. More than 450 veterinary students from 33 academic institutions were represented at the symposium, including 26 veterinary colleges from the United States, two from Canada, and two from Europe as well as five other research centers and universities, including NCI/NIH. Other participants included University Program Directors and representatives from the NIH, Merial, Burroughs Wellcome, the Association of American Veterinary Colleges, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Students attending the symposium included veterinary students participating in summer research programs as well as DVM/PhD students and postdoctoral veterinarians in research training programs. The symposium theme of “Solving Complex Challenges at the Interface of Humans, Animal and their Environment” emphasized the impact of the One Health concept on local, national and global sustainability as well as human and animal health and scientific discovery.

Format: The symposium lasted two full days with some preliminary activities starting on the afternoon before the symposium. These included the Office of Research Infrastructure Programs (ORIP) T35/32 Directors meeting which was held during lunch. Topics of discussion included the Division of Comparative Medicine/ORIP administrative updates and budget/funding issues related to T (training) grants. This meeting was followed by a Colloquium on Veterinary Training supported in part by ORIP where several topics related to the veterinary research workforce were discussed and included the following presentations: “ORIP Strategic Plan for Veterinary Research training” by Dr. Franziska Grieder, Director, ORIP; “The Veterinary Research Workforce: Role of Veterinary Schools in Promoting Career Opportunities” by Dr. Michael Lairmore, Dean, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine; and “Animal Models of Disease” by Dr. Peter Ernst, Director, Comparative Medicine and Pathology, UC San Diego School of Medicine among others. Later in the evening, Dr. Isaac Pessah, Professor and Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Education, UC Davis, welcomed all symposium participants.

The program for the morning of the first day included a keynote presentation by Dr. Peter Doherty, a member of the St. Jude Faculty, who talked about his career as a veterinarian scientist and the research that led to him and Dr. Rolf Zinkernagel, Professor of Experimental Immunology, University of Zurich, being awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1996 for the discovery of how the immune system recognizes virus-infected cells. Dr. Doherty’s lecture was followed by an insightful presentation by Dr. Ajit Varki, distinguished Professor of Medicine, UC San Diego, entitled “Disease Differences between Humans and other Hominids”. The morning session ended with a talk on “Strategic Priorities for Environmental Health Science Research” by Dr. Rick Woychik, Deputy Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, NIH. The afternoon breakout sessions included talks on “Peripheral Influences on Nerve Function,” “Molecular and Regenerative Cures” and “Genes and Disease.” Later in the afternoon, there were two poster sessions based on the veterinary students’ summer research experiences.





The second day consisted of three plenary sessions related to “Emerging Infectious Diseases,” “Global Pandemics Early Warning Systems” and “Searching for Elusive Nonhuman Primate species in Africa.” Afternoon breakout sessions included talks on “Translational Medicine Oncology,” “Translational Medicine Ophthalmology” and “Translational Medicine One Health.” Late afternoon sessions ended with two poster sessions showcasing summer research projects completed by veterinary students. Several awards were presented during the evening; these included the AVMA Lifetime Excellence in Research Award given to Dr. Ian Duncan, University of Wisconsin, and the AVMA/Winn Feline Foundation Excellence in Feline Research Award to Dr. Urs Giger, University of Pennsylvania. The AVMA /AVMF Young Investigator Award was presented to Dr. Johanna Elfenbein, North Carolina State University (first place), Dr. Greg Brennan, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (second place) and Dr. Annie Newell-Fugate, Texas A&M (third place).

The Burroughs Wellcome Trust had special sessions on Thursday and Friday morning for selected young, early career veterinarian investigators related to navigating the start-up negotiation process in academia, finding a place and fitting in at academic institutions, establishing oneself in a research field and building a scientific reputation.

