Scripps Clinic investigator receives top hematology award

LA JOLIA, date -- A Research Institute of Scripps Clinic investigator has been awarded the 18th annual Dameshek Prize, the top research honor given an individual by the American Society of Hematology.

Dr. Theodore Zimmerman, chief of the Scripps Clinic Coagulation Laboratory and head of the experimental hemostasis division, was named for his work in hereditary bleeding disorders, particularly hemophilia and Von Willebrand's disease.

Zimmerman was awarded the Dameshek Prize on Dec. 6 at the American Society of Hematology's annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas. It is given annually to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to hematology.

He is most known for his research into the structure and function of the Factor VIII molecule, a coagulation factor essential for the formation of fibrin, an insoluble protein that binds blood platelets together into blood clots.

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Over the past few years, Zimmerman and Dr. Carol Fulcher of Scripps Clinic developed a method of producing a highly purified concentrate of Factor VIII, the blood coagulation protein used to treat hemophilia. The method involves exposing Factor VIII-containing plasma to monoclonal antibodies attached to a bed of inert material. These antibodies bind and retain the Factor VIII complex while all other materials, including viruses, are washed away. Pure Factor VIII is then stripped from the antibodies.

The process was developed commercially, and a 99.9 percent-pure concentrate known as Monoclate is now used worldwide.

Before Monoclate became available, hemophiliacs risked treatment with impure Factor VIII concentrates, and frequently contracted non-A, non-B hepatitis, AIDS and other viral infections.

In addition, Zimmerman is noted for his work with the Von Willebrand factor, a carrier for the Factor VIII molecule and a necessary component of normal platelet function and blood clotting.

Zimmerman, a graduate of Harvard Medical School, has been at Scripps Clinic for 18 years. Author of numerous articles and abstracts on blood coagulation, in 1986 he was one of the first recipients of a National Institutes of Health MERIT (Method to Extend Research in Time) award - a 10-year, $1.8 million grant to fund research into Von Willebrand's disease, which is marked by excessive bleeding and easy bruising. In 1985, he was appointed chairman of the National Hemophilia Foundation's Medical and Scientific Advisory Council.

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