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GLADSTONE INSTITUTE OF NEUROLOGICAL DISEASE NEWS

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GLADSTONE'S LENNART MUCKE WINS POTAMKIN PRIZE FOR IDENTIFYING NEW AVENUES IN ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – February 18, 2010—Lennart Mucke, MD, Director of the Gladstone Institute of Neurological Disease (GIND), has been named a recipient of the American Academy of Neurology's prestigious Potamkin Prize. Mucke is recognized for the development of experimental strategies to make the brain more resistant against Alzheimer's disease and for instigating a turnaround in the direction of research in this field. Mucke and his co-recipient Bruce Miller, MD, UCSF professor of neurology and psychiatry, will be presented with the prize for research in Pick's, Alzheimer's and related diseases on April 15.

Our ability to think, remember and control our lives depends on finely balanced activities in complex neural networks in our brains. Alzheimer's disease erodes and destabilizes these networks, setting in motion vicious cycles of abnormal neuronal activity resulting in cognitive deficits and neurodegeneration. Mucke and colleagues discovered strategies that effectively prevent and even reverse abnormal network activity and cognitive impairments in mouse models of the disease. Remarkably, the same strategies also increased resistance to epileptic seizures, suggesting that they could be of broad therapeutic benefit.

Most treatments for dementing disorders currently under development aim to block the buildup of poisonous proteins in the brain, but the long-term efficacy and safety of these approaches remains unknown. The strategies Mucke discovered could complement these approaches by making the brain more resistant to these abnormal proteins and to other disease processes causing abnormal neuronal activities.

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Ten years ago, many scientists believed the dementia of Alzheimer's disease was caused by the accumulation of amyloid plaques in the brain. Mucke and colleagues showed that a minuscule constituent of these plaques, known as amyloid-beta peptide, can impair the function of brain cells independent of plaques, thus narrowing the whereabouts of the disease culprit from the "haystack" to the "needle."

Miller is the clinical director of UCSF's Memory and Aging Center and has a special interest in the behavioral effects of dementia, notably frontotemporal lobar degeneration (FTLD), which used to be more commonly known as Pick's disease. Along with Alzheimer's disease, FTLD is the leading cause of dementia in patients under 65 years. Thanks in part to the pioneering work of Miller and his colleagues, the condition is gaining significantly wider prominence and neurologists are now able to distinguish it from Alzheimer's in its earlier stage.

According to Mucke, the Potamkin award is "a wonderful reinforcement of the synergism" between himself and Miller. "Working together, we have developed innovative translational programs for the investigation and treatment of dementia and related disorders." Miller concurs and describes the Potamkin Prize as the highlight of his academic career.

Lennart Mucke's primary affiliation is with the Gladstone Institute of Neurological Disease, where he is director/senior investigator and where his laboratory is located and his research is conducted. He is also the Joseph B. Martin Distinguished Professor of Neuroscience at UCSF.

The Gladstone Institutes is a nonprofit, independent research and educational institution, consisting of the Gladstone Institute of Cardiovascular Disease, the Gladstone Institute of Virology and Immunology, and the Gladstone Institute of Neurological Disease. Independent in its governance, finances and research programs, Gladstone shares a close affiliation with UCSF through its faculty, who hold joint UCSF appointments.

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