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NIDA Contacts: Dorie Hightower or
Sara Rosario Wilson
301-443-6245

media@nida.nih.gov

Contacto en Español: 301-594-6145

NIDA's Dr. Kenner C. Rice Receives Prestigious Smissman Award
Longtime NIH Scientist Honored for Research on Drug Abuse

Dr. Kenner C. Rice—whose research has led to the development of compounds or medications that have the potential to treat or prevent drug addiction—has been selected to receive the 2007 Smissman Award presented by the American Chemical Society (ACS). Dr. Rice, chief of the Chemical Biology Research Branch of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH), will be recognized at the ACS national meeting in August.

Among Dr. Rice's contributions spanning a 35-year career are the development of the NIH Opiate Total Synthesis, which allows medical opiates to be produced synthetically in any quantity, offering opiate researchers independence from foreign sources of opium and providing insights for the development of new non-opioid drugs. Rice's work also led to the discovery of an imaging agent for positron emission tomography (PET)—a medical imaging technique for study of biochemistry in living humans—that is now being used to study how opioid drugs work in the brain; and the development of medications that prevent cocaine self-administration in rhesus monkeys. These agents may be useful in treating cocaine and methamphetamine abuse in humans as well. Currently, no effective medication therapies exist for addiction to these stimulant drugs.

"Dr. Rice is indeed deserving of this prestigious honor," said NIH Director Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D. "During his tenure at NIH he has designed and directed the synthesis of many drugs and research tools that have helped identify and characterize different drug effects and interactions. His fellowship programs have helped to create a whole new generation of scientists producing exciting research in the fields of organic and medicinal chemistry."

Since joining the NIH in 1972, Dr. Rice has mentored more than 70 postdoctoral fellows from 20 countries, many of whom have gone on to prominent scientific positions in industry, government, and academia. He has authored or coauthored more than 600 published papers and has over 40 patents.

Dr. Rice received his BS degree from the Virginia Military Institute in 1961. He then received his doctorate in organic chemistry from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1966, where he also conducted postdoctoral work. He conducted antimalarial research at Walter Reed Army Medical Center as an active duty member of the Army, and also was a senior scientist at Ciba-Geigy for three years, before joining the National Institute of Arthritis, Metabolism, and Digestive Diseases (now the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases) as a senior staff fellow in 1972. Dr. Rice moved to NIDA in 2006—the research program that Dr. Rice presently directs there began in 1939 and is one of the oldest continuous programs at NIH.

The Bristol-Myers Squibb Smissman Award, established by the American Chemical Society in honor of Professor Edward E. Smissman of the University of Kansas, is given to a living scientist whose research, teaching or service has had a substantial impact on the intellectual and theoretical development of the field of medicinal chemistry.

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