



National Institute on Drug Abuse
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/>

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Latent HIV infection focus of NIDA's 2010 Avant-Garde Award

Selected awardee studies the mechanisms of latent HIV infection to develop counter measures aimed at eliminating the virus

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health, announced today that Dr. Eric M. Verdin of the J. David Gladstone Institutes in San Francisco, Calif., has been selected as the 2010 recipient of the NIDA Avant-Garde Award for HIV/AIDS Research for his proposal to study the mechanisms of latent HIV infection. NIDA's annual Avant-Garde award competition, now in its third year, is intended to stimulate high-impact research that may lead to groundbreaking opportunities for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS in drug abusers. Awardees receive \$500,000 per year for five years to support their research. Dr. Verdin is Senior Investigator and Associate Director of the Gladstone Institute of Virology and Immunology and Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.

"Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) has been very successful in managing HIV. However, these medications do not rid the body of the virus, and patients can become symptomatic and more infective if their treatment is interrupted," said NIDA Director Dr. Nora D. Volkow, who announced the award. "Dr. Verdin's innovative proposal seeks to identify the cellular proteins that control the latency process, which allows the virus to remain in a persistently dormant state, so that we can better understand how to completely eliminate the virus from the body."

The long-term persistence of HIV in a latent state in patients treated with HAART prevents the eradication of the disease, and forces patient to remain on HAART for their entire life. At this time, our understanding of how latent HIV infection occurs is basic. Dr. Verdin's project aims to develop a new single cell technology to examine how HIV latency is established, maintained, and how the virus becomes reactivated, in primary human lymphoid cells. By observing the fate of the virus in single cells, Dr. Verdin hopes to be able to devise novel strategies to eliminate latent HIV infection, or to restrict the latent pool to a size that can be controlled by the immune system.

Dr. Verdin was selected from 30 applicants whose proposals reflect diverse scientific disciplines and approaches to HIV/AIDS research. The Avant-Garde Awards are modeled after the NIH Pioneer Awards and are granted to scientists of exceptional creativity who propose high-impact

research that will open new avenues for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS among drug abusers.

Drug abuse and its related behaviors, such as sharing drug injection equipment and/or engaging in risky sexual behavior while intoxicated, have been central to the spread of HIV/AIDS since the pandemic began more than 25 years ago. NIDA's HIV/AIDS research program supports a multidisciplinary portfolio that investigates the role of drug use and its related behaviors in the evolving dynamics of HIV/AIDS epidemiology, natural history, etiology, pathogenesis, treatment, and prevention. <http://www.drugabuse.gov/AIDS>.

For information about the Avant-Garde award for Innovative HIV/AIDS Research, please visit <http://drugabuse.gov/avgp.html>. Information about the 2011 Avant-Garde award will be posted on this site soon.

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The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy and improve practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found on the NIDA home page at www.drugabuse.gov. To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA's new DrugPubs research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or fax or email requests to 240-645-0227 or drugpubs@nida.nih.gov. Online ordering is available at <http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov>. NIDA's new media guide can be found at <http://drugabuse.gov/mediaguide>.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — The Nation's Medical Research Agency — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.