



## **Dr. George C. Tsokos Selected as 2015 Recipient of the Lupus Insight Prize**

NEW YORK, NY (May 21, 2015) – **George C. Tsokos, M.D.**, Chief of the Rheumatology Division at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, has been selected as the 2015 recipient of the [Lupus Insight Prize](#). The Lupus Insight Prize is a collaborative initiative among the [Alliance for Lupus Research \(ALR\)](#), the [Lupus Foundation of America \(LFA\)](#), and the [Lupus Research Institute \(LRI\)](#).

Dr. Tsokos is widely recognized as one of the foremost leaders of modern lupus research with landmark discoveries that have brought understanding of lupus to new levels, shedding new light on how the disease develops and progresses over time. Editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Clinical Immunology*, he is on the editorial boards of more than 30 publications, has published over 400 papers and has received numerous awards and honors recognizing his contributions to the field.

The Lupus Insight Prize recognizes a major, novel insight and/or discovery that has the promise of changing thinking about lupus as well as a high likelihood of generating further advances in the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. The award provides \$200,000 for use in innovative research in the prototypical autoimmune disease lupus.

### **Innovative Project Aims to Improve Lupus Nephritis Treatment**

Dr. Tsokos will use the award funds to study the molecular link between the immune system and the kidney damage seen frequently in patients with lupus nephritis, a dangerous complication of lupus. His efforts will also work to develop a targeted delivery of drugs to block the action of a single enzyme specifically to kidney cells.

His earlier studies have shown that the enzyme calcium calmodulin kinase 4 (CaMK4) plays a role in autoimmunity and inflammation in lupus. In animal studies, Dr. Tsokos discovered that CaMK4 also damages kidney cells so they can no longer prevent proteins from leaking out of the kidneys into the urine. This leakage, known as proteinuria, is a key indicator of lupus nephritis and can lead to edema - swelling of various parts of the body from a build-up of excess fluid. Now, he will evaluate highly targeted delivery of drugs that inhibit CaMK4 while honing in on just those cells impacted by the enzyme.

“Our work has potential to significantly improve treatment of lupus nephritis, a condition that can lead to kidney failure, the need for chronic dialysis or kidney transplantation and potentially death,” commented Dr. Tsokos. “Such a specific administration of a drug targeting only those cells impacted by

one enzyme should relieve lupus nephritis symptoms while minimizing debilitating side effects common with current treatment.”

### **Lupus Nephritis, a Dangerous and Common Complication**

Many people with lupus develop lupus nephritis — when lupus attacks the kidneys. The most common symptom is swelling in the hands, feet or face. Signs of kidney damage can also include frequent urination, foamy or dark urine, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, and pain in the lower back. Lupus nephritis is typically treated with immunosuppressive drugs that increase risk of infection as well as corticosteroids which can cause serious side effects such as weight gain and high blood pressure. People with lupus nephritis may need dialysis, which filters the blood through a machine to remove waste products from the body, and in severe cases, a kidney transplant.

### **Award Presentation at FOCIS 2015**

The three organizations will present Dr. Tsokos with the Lupus Insight Prize during a formal ceremony on June 24 at [FOCIS 2015](#), the annual meeting of the Federation of Clinical Immunology Societies in San Diego. There, leading clinicians and researchers share the latest breakthroughs in lupus and other diseases affecting the immune system. Registration for the FOCIS meeting is not required to attend the ceremony. At the ceremony, Dr. Tsokos will share plans about his project and its implications for treating lupus nephritis.

An independent review committee selecting Dr. Tsokos’ project was comprised of leading lupus scientific leaders from across the country and representatives of the three sponsoring lupus organizations. Nominations were reviewed based on several criteria, including academic achievements, creativity, insight, and potential for future advances that will improve the lives of people with lupus.

### **About Lupus**

Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease that causes inflammation and tissue damage to any organ system in the body. The health effects of lupus include heart attacks, strokes, seizures, organ failure, and possible death. An estimated 1.5 million Americans and at least 5 million people worldwide have lupus.

### **About the Funding Organizations**

For more information about the Alliance for Lupus Research, visit [www.alr.org/](http://www.alr.org/).

For more information about the Lupus Foundation of America, visit [www.lupus.org](http://www.lupus.org).

For more information about the Lupus Research Institute, visit [www.lupusresearchinstitute.org](http://www.lupusresearchinstitute.org).

### **About FOCIS**

FOCIS exists to improve human health through immunology by fostering interdisciplinary approaches to understand and treat immune-based diseases. The organization is made up of 56 Member Societies representing more than 65,000 clinician scientists. FOCIS 2015, to be held June 24-27 in San Diego, brings together an interdisciplinary group of world-renowned physicians and researchers to share the latest findings on lupus and other diseases impacting the immune system.

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