



Gerald Nepom Appointed President of Prominent Clinical Research Society, FOCIS

SEATTLE, Wash. (June 7, 2007) - The Federation of Clinical Immunological Societies (FOCIS) announced the selection of Gerald Nepom, MD, PhD, Director of the Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason, as president of the organization, for a two-year term beginning on June 10. FOCIS is an international, interdisciplinary professional federation linking more than 36 major professional societies representing 40,000 professionals with a goal of improving human health through immunology.

An internationally recognized scientist, Nepom is well-known for his contributions in the area of immunology and Type-1 diabetes. His team discovered genetic markers that can indicate a person's risk for rheumatoid arthritis and autoimmune diabetes and biomarkers to detect and measure specific immune cells in blood samples.

"Dr. Nepom has distinguished himself as a clinician scientist who has a clear vision for the future of the field of clinical immunology. His leadership will undoubtedly drive the mission of FOCIS to foster interdisciplinary approaches to both understand and treat immune-based diseases. I can think of no one better suited to lead the Federation," said C. Garrison Fathman, MD, Stanford University School of Medicine, founder and past president of FOCIS.

"The core objective of FOCIS is to improve human health through immunology by translating new knowledge from basic science into multiple clinical disciplines. It will be my role to work with the FOCIS constituencies to encourage broad and effective evolution of this concept throughout the scientific and medical community," said Dr. Nepom.

"Although immunology has existed in the medical vernacular for a century, the reality is that until very recently none of the fundamental mechanisms of immune function and regulation were understood. And now that these are being discovered, we realize for the first time how broadly our immune systems really work.

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The same cells and molecules which protect us from infections serve an even more fundamental role as biological sensors of tissue integrity. Thus, interventions which modulate immune function can impact many different diseases. Molecular tools to understand and monitor this are now available in the research laboratory, so we need to have effective bridges to clinical medicine in order to utilize this knowledge for safe and effective therapy," Nepom continued.

Autoimmune diseases affect 40 million people in the United States. A healthy immune system protects the body from invaders such as infections, but sometimes the immune system attacks healthy cells in the body's organs or systems. These malfunctions can cause more than 80 different types of immune diseases including rheumatoid arthritis, Type-1 diabetes and multiple sclerosis.

FOCIS

The Federation of Clinical Immunology Societies (FOCIS) exists to improve human health through immunology by fostering interdisciplinary approaches to both understand and treat immune-based diseases. Initially established as a cross-disciplinary meeting, FOCIS held its first Annual Meeting in 2001. After two successful consecutive meetings, FOCIS incorporated in 2003 as a 501(c)3 organization. Now in its fifth year of existence, FOCIS has 20 Member Societies and 14 Affiliate Societies, representing roughly 40,000 clinician scientists. A Federation of this size provides a voice for clinical immunologists and ultimately strives to improve patient care.

The Benaroya Research Institute

The Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason (BRI) is a non-profit research institute working to unlock the mysteries of the immune system. Its team of world-renowned scientists is focused on identifying causes and cures for devastating diseases including diabetes, arthritis, heart disease and cancer. BRI is an international leader in immune system and autoimmune disease research with a focus on translating laboratory discoveries to real life applications. BRI also has a clinical research program, which conducts approximately 150 clinical research trials every year along with clinicians at Virginia Mason Medical Center and other institutions.

Virginia Mason, founded in 1920, is a non-profit comprehensive regional health care system that combines a primary and specialty care group practice of more than 400 physicians with a 336-bed acute care Seattle hospital.

For more information: www.focisnet.org and BenaroyaResearch.org

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