Commentary

Professor De Clercq and 25 years of international collaboration on antiviral research

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Professor Erik De Clercq, recent recipient of the International Society for Antiviral Research (ISAR) ‘Outstanding Contributions to the Society Award’, recounts 25 years of antiviral research collaborating with his colleagues and friends in Japan.

Introduction

It is an honour and a great pleasure to introduce the article by Professor Erik De Clercq in this issue of Antiviral Chemistry & Chemotherapy [1]. The 25th International Conference on Antiviral Research (ICAR) was held in Sapporo, Japan from 16–19 April 2012, and was cosponsored by the International Society for Antiviral Research (ISAR) and the Japanese Association for Antiviral Therapy (JAAT). This was the second time ICAR was held in Japan. To commemorate the silver anniversary of ICAR, Professor De Clercq was invited to present a personal and historic perspective on antiviral drug development. Professor De Clercq is one of the most prolific and influential scientists in the history of antiviral drug development. He has enjoyed a unique, productive and warm personal history with many key scientists all over the world, and fitly, in Japan. To underscore the close ties between Japan and ISAR, Professor De Clercq elected to present a lecture with a special focus on his work and professional relationships with his many Japanese colleagues. The article in this issue of AVCC is based on this entertaining and informative lecture he delivered at the 25th ICAR. The article will offer fond reminiscences for our more senior colleagues who personally know Professor De Clercq and the Japanese scientists he warmly mentions in his article. For our more junior colleagues who know Professor De Clercq from his well-deserved reputation in the pantheon of antiviral researchers, his article will serve as a source of indispensable information and references. In both cases, the article will provide compelling reading.

Professor De Clercq was instrumental in efforts that both recognized the need for an antiviral research society and paved the way for the conception of ISAR and ICAR in Il Ciocco, Italy in 1987. Professor De Clercq was a member of the original Board of Directors of ISAR along with George Galasso, Earl Kern, Fons Billiau, Rich Whitley, Bill Shannon and Kirk Field. In 1988, Professor De Clercq was president elect of ISAR and subsequently served as one of the Society’s earliest and most illustrious presidents. Since his retirement from the Rega Institute for Medical Research, KU Leuven, Belgium, Professor De Clercq has continued to be actively involved with the Society. At the 25th ICAR he was recognized for his significant and long-term contributions to ISAR with the ‘Outstanding Contributions to the Society Award’. Since the founding of ISAR, this prestigious and very rare award has only been given to two other individuals, George Galasso and Earl Kern. Having been a long-time admirer of Professor De Clercq and his work and as president of ISAR, I had the good fortune to present this award to him and introduce his lecture ‘Success and failure in antiviral drug development: a personal perspective with a Japanese connection’. I am sure you will enjoy this personal account of the history of antiviral drug development from one of its most important contributors.

Acknowledgement

JMC was ISAR President from 2010–2012.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no competing interests.
References


Received 10 July 2012; accepted 10 July 2012; published online 19 September 2012