INRC 2016 Awardees

FOUNDERS' LECTURE – LAKSHMI DEVI
Dr Lakshmi Devi is a Professor in the Departments of Pharmacology and Systems Therapeutics, Psychiatry and Neuroscience. She is also the Dean for Academic Development and Enrichment and the Director of the Interdisciplinary Training in Drug Abuse Research Program at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. As a researcher she has made an impressive contribution to the field of opioids. She has been widely recognized for her research exploring the novel pharmacology of receptor dimerization with a particular focus on receptor heterodimers. An important part of her research is directed to investigation of fundamental mechanisms underlying opioid and cannabinoid receptor activation by combining molecular biological, biochemical, cell-biological, pharmacological and behavioral techniques.

Dr Devi received her PhD at the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada and her postdoctoral training with Avram Goldstein at the Addiction Research Foundation, Palo Alto, California and at the Vollum Institute, Portland, Oregon with Ed Herbert. She continued her research career as Assistant and Associate Professor at the faculty of Pharmacology at the New York University before joining Mount Sinai School of Medicine as a Professor of Pharmacology and Biological Sciences. Dr Devi has authored around 200 scientific research articles and reviews, most of them published in high ranked international journals including PNAS, Nature and Science. She has mentored more than 70 trainees including medical students, graduate students, postdoctoral research associates, and visiting scientists.

The scientific achievements of Dr Lakshmi Devi have been recognized by many grants, patents and several honors and awards. The latter include the National Institute of Drug Abuse Senior Scientist and Mentorship Award, the Dean’s Award for Excellence in Basic Research, and the NIH MERIT award. She has also been elected as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Dr Devi is widely praised for her role in organizing symposia in national and international conferences. Since her first meeting in Garmisch Partenkirchen in 1983, she has been a frequent attendant at the INRC meetings and together with her students and collaborators provided outstanding contributions to our organization. She served as a member of the executive committee of INRC (1996–1998) and as the President of the INRC (2006–2010). It is fair to say that Dr Lakshmi Devi belongs to the core of successful researchers that has been essential for the development and maintenance of INRC as an organization promoting high-quality science in the opioid field.

YOUNG INVESTIGATORS AWARD – AMYNAH PRADHAN
Dr Amynah Pradhan is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She attended McGill University in Montreal, Canada, for her undergraduate and graduate studies. She received her PhD in 2005 from the Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics; with a thesis entitled "Dissociation between behavioral and biochemical measures of mu and delta opioid receptors in rat central nervous system". She subsequently joined AstraZeneca R&D Montreal for a 1 year postdoctoral fellowship, in which she studied the role of SNSR1 protein in pain perception. In 2006, she joined Dr Brigitte Kieffer’s laboratory at the IGBMC in Illkirch, France. There she developed projects to understand the role of ligand directed signaling at the delta opioid receptor. She established that in vivo, delta opioid receptor trafficking critically controlled behavioral outcomes; and that chronic treatment with high- and low-internalizing delta agonists produced different types of tolerance. She subsequently joined the laboratory of Christopher Evans at UCLA, Los Angeles, USA. In this fellowship, she studied the ligand-specific recruitment of arrestins to the delta opioid receptor. She also developed an interest in migraine, and her work has led to the development of delta opioid receptor agonists for the treatment of this disorder. In 2013, she joined the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Illinois at Chicago in a tenure-track faculty position.

During her postdoctoral fellowships with Brigitte Kieffer and Chris Evans, Amynah Pradhan showed great promise as a young scientist, and she was highly recommended for her constructive attitude to scientific questions and her outstanding ability to move projects forward. These achievements gave her a strong and solid basis for her appointment to her present faculty position. Her current research is still focused on the neurobiology of opioid receptors. Her studies aim to elucidate the behavioral consequences of agonist-specific signaling and trafficking of delta opioid receptors. In addition, her lab is also interested in understanding the differing roles of opioid receptors in migraine and post-traumatic headache. Dr Pradhan has published around 30 full papers in high-ranked international journals. She has active grant support from NIH-NIDA, NIAAA, and the US Department of Defense. She has received several honors and awards, including The National Headache Foundation Lectureship Award, International Headache Society Trainee’s Excellence Award, and The INRC NIDA International Travel Award. She has been attending INRC meetings since 2003, where she has contributed excellent oral and poster presentations on her opioid research, and has actively participated with her creative attitude in many discussions.