

Backgrounder

Henry G. Friesen International Prize in Health Research Dr. Harold Varmus – 2008 Recipient

Dr. Harold Varmus, President of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York and Nobel Laureate, is the recipient of the 2008 Henry G. Friesen International Prize in Health Research. The Friesen Prize recognizes Dr. Varmus' exceptional leadership and innovative contributions to medical research and to the promotion of science over the past four decades.

- His early research on retroviruses, conducted jointly with Dr. J. Michael Bishop at the University of California, San Francisco, led to the discovery of a class of normal cellular genes that undergo mutation during the generation of human cancer; for this work, the pair received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1989.
- His more recent work has focused on the development of mouse models of human cancer, with special emphasis on mutations that produce adenocarcinomas of the lung. Dr. Varmus has published over 400 scientific papers and several textbooks, including one for the general public. W.W. Norton will publish a more personal account of his scientific career, *The Art and Politics of Science*, this winter.
- From 1993 until the end of 1999, Dr. Varmus served under President Bill Clinton as Director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, the largest organization in the world for the conduct and support of medical research. During his tenure at the NIH, he was an effective advocate for basic research, promoted several novel research initiatives, and was instrumental in securing a plan for doubling the agency's budget over five years.
- As part of his efforts to promote the use of science to address global health, he has chaired the Scientific Board of the Grand Challenges in Global Health at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The GCGH initiative has awarded nearly \$450 million to over forty research teams to work on roadblocks to progress against major infectious diseases, including TB, HIV/AIDS, and malaria, as well as drug resistance and non-communicable diseases.
- To ensure that new knowledge is used effectively and shared widely, in both developing and advanced countries, he established a public digital library of scientific papers (PubMedCentral) at the NIH and is a co-founder and chairman of the board of the Public Library of Science, a publisher of prestigious open access journals in medicine and biology. As an advocate of presenting science to the public, he has been a frequent panelist and guest host on the Charlie Rose television show.
- Friends of Canadian Institutes of Health Research (FCIHR) established the Henry G. Friesen International Prize in Health Research in 2005 in recognition of Dr. Henry Friesen's distinguished leadership, vision and innovative contributions to Health and Health Research Policy. The Prize is a collaborative project of FCIHR with the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS) and CBC Radio One and includes a \$20,000 Award.

Further information on Friends of CIHR and the Friesen International Prize is available at: www.fcibr.ca. For a full biographical sketch of Dr. Varmus, please see: <http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/1780.cfm>