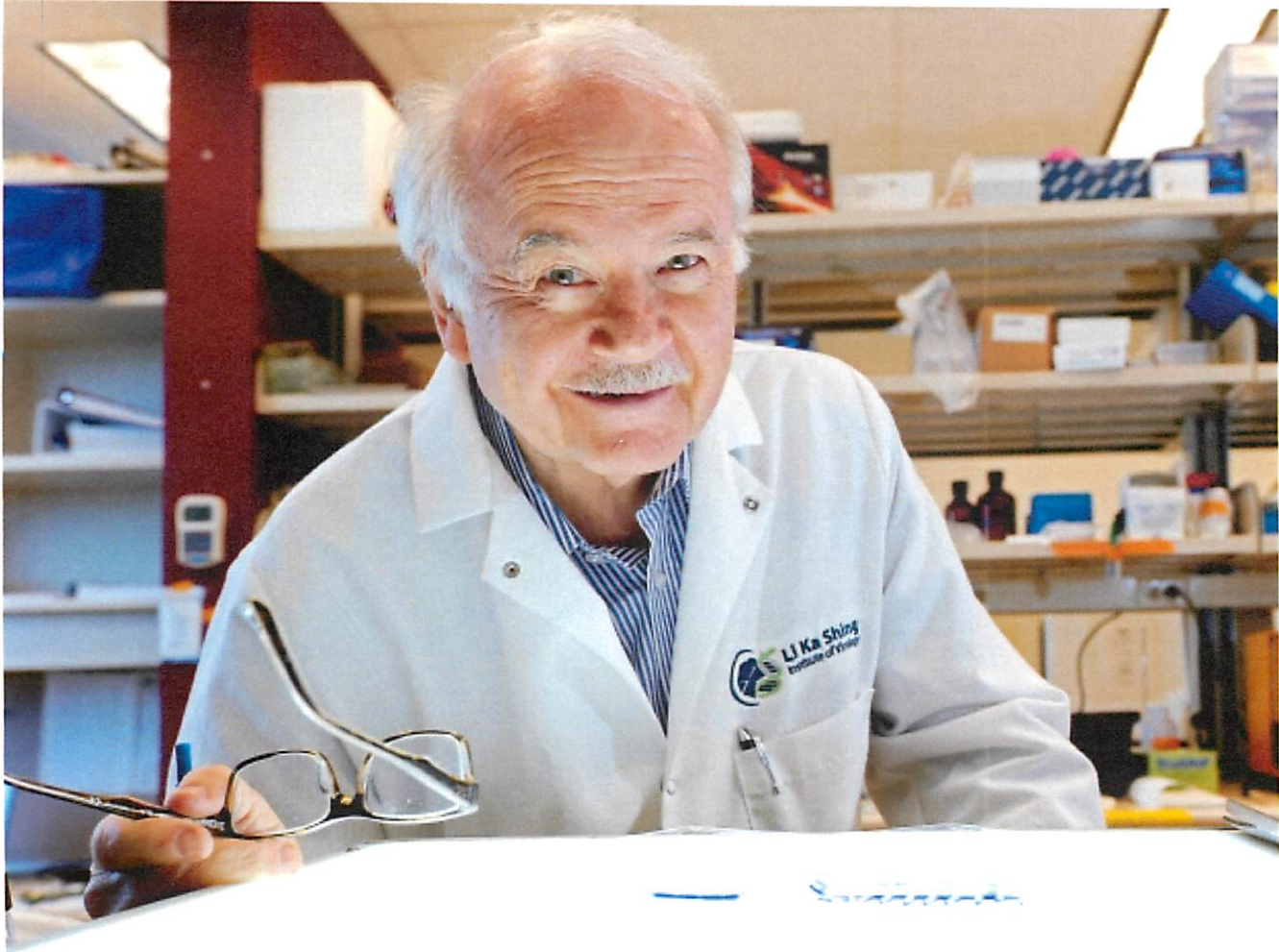


Hepatitis drug earns U of A researcher prestigious health award

BY MARTY KLINKENBERG, EDMONTON JOURNAL APRIL 14, 2015



Lorne Tyrrell, a University of Alberta researcher, has been awarded the 2015 Killam Prize for Health Sciences, for his work on hepatitis B and C.

Photograph by: Larry Wong, Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - The University of Alberta researcher who helped discover the world's first oral medication for hepatitis B is receiving one of Canada's most prestigious medical awards.

Inducted in 2011 into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame, Lorne Tyrrell will be announced on Tuesday as the winner of the 2015 Killam Prize for Health Sciences as recognition for the lifetime commitment he has made in studying viral hepatitis.

He said Monday that he was so overwhelmed when he learned three weeks ago that he would be receiving the \$100,000 prize, that he reacted with stunned silence.

"I am a rather emotional person, and I couldn't speak for a few minutes," said Tyrrell, 72. "It is a very significant award, and one I am extremely pleased to receive.

"It is a wonderful award, and very nice recognition from my peers."

A professor in the Department of Medical Microbiology and Immunology whose efforts led to the worldwide licensing of the drug lamivudine for treatment of hepatitis in 1998, Tyrrell will travel to Ottawa to receive the award May 12 at Rideau Hall. He is the eighth faculty member from the university to receive a Killam Prize since they were inaugurated by the Canada Council for the Arts in 1981 with a donation by Mrs. Dorothy J. Killam in memory of her husband, Izaak Walton Killam.

Killam prizes are handed out each year to recognize outstanding research in health sciences, engineering, natural sciences and humanities, with University of Alberta astrophysicist and astronomer Werner Israel (1984) and biologist David Schindler (2003) among previous winners.

“Lorne Tyrrell is a superstar in the field of virology who richly deserves this esteemed honour,” said Richard Fedorak, the dean of the university’s Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. “Throughout his long career, Dr. Tyrrell has explored the boundaries of medical science.

“His work with viral hepatitis alone has immeasurably helped tens of thousands of people around the world.”

A former dean of the medical school and director of the Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology, Tyrrell has spent more than 30 years studying liver disease and ranks among the world’s experts in viral hepatitis. He began seeing patients with hepatitis at his clinic in Edmonton in 1983, which helped drive the research for which he is famous.

Lamivudine, the drug he helped identify in 1998, was the first oral antiviral agent proven to be effective for hepatitis B and is still prescribed to many of the 350 million people infected around the world.

His U of A laboratory is working to develop a vaccine for hepatitis C in conjunction with Michael Houghton, a fellow professor and Canada Excellence Research Chair Department Medical Microbiology and Immunology.

“The recognition I have received is very gratifying,” Tyrrell said. “It has been an exciting time to be in research of infectious diseases. We are seeing wonderful things happening in medicine.”

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Previous U of A Killam winners

The Canada Council Killam Prizes were inaugurated in 1981 with a donation by Mrs. Dorothy J. Killam in memory of her husband, Izaak Walton Killam. The prizes were created to honour eminent Canadian scholars and scientists engaged in research, whether in industry, government agencies or universities.

Here are the previous winners from the University of Alberta:

1981 — Raymond Lemieux, Natural Sciences

1984 — Werner Israel, Natural Sciences

2001 — Robert Morgenstern, Engineering

2002 — Robert Moody, Natural Sciences

2003 — David Schindler, Natural Sciences

2013 — Lorne Babiuk, Health Sciences

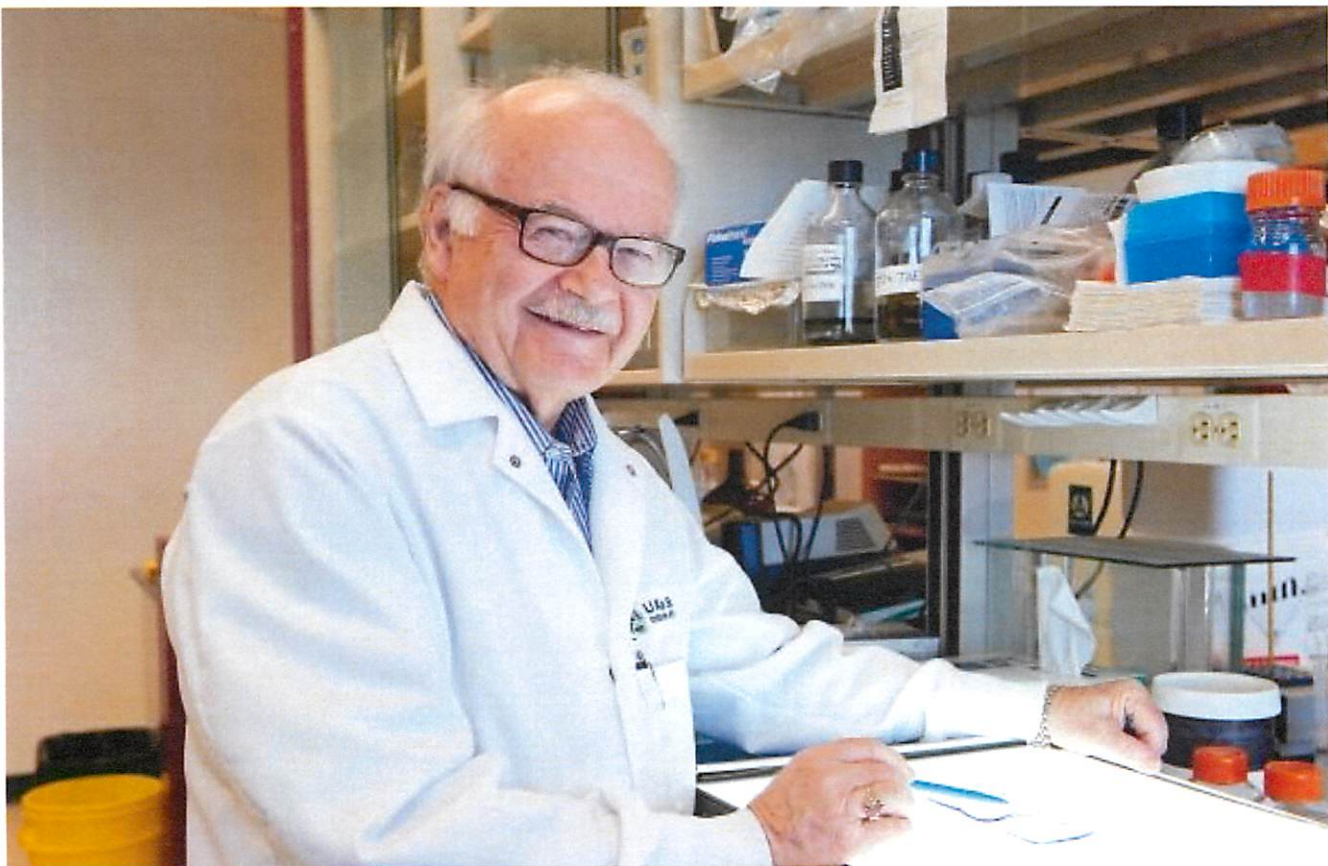
2013 — Witold Pedrycz, Engineering

2015 — Lorne Tyrrell, Health Sciences

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