

EDITOR'S PAGE

An Offer That Can't (Or Shouldn't) Be Refused

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I recently had a conversation with Bob Roberts, the Chairman of the American College of Cardiology Foundation (ACCF) Research Fellowship Awards Committee. We were discussing the continuing need for physician-scientists in general and clinical investigators in particular. This problem is well recognized, of course, and has been previously addressed in these pages (1). Concern has repeatedly been expressed by many parties about the increasing deficit of physician-investigators and the impact it could have on efforts to improve human health. On this occasion, however, our attention was not directed as much to the problem as to the opportunities available to remedy it.

A number of actions have been and are being taken by involved parties, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), to increase the number of physician-investigators. The ACCF has also made this a priority and has developed an extensive program of research fellowship awards to nurture investigative cardiologists. These programs represent a phenomenal opportunity for fellows, junior faculty cardiologists, and their training program directors. Given the magnitude of the need for physician-investigators and the dearth of resources previously directed to remedy it, it would be a catastrophe if these opportunities were not vigorously sought and seized. Therefore, I thought I would devote this Editor's Page to delineating these ACCF Research Awards.

ACCF/Merck Adult Cardiology Research Fellowship Awards. The first and oldest ongoing award program of the ACCF is the "Merck Award." This program, which is currently in its 25th year, has provided awards to 132 trainees. The program provides \$40,000 awards to six fellows per year for a full-time research commitment. Preference is given to individuals with no more than two years of previous full-time research experience. A priority is also placed on clinical research training and experience directly involving patients or human subjects. Success has rendered the Merck Awards very prestigious, and they have been the flagship of the American College of Cardiology (ACC) in training physician-scientists.

ACCF Career Development Awards. The College initiated career development awards in 1979 to foster the development of research careers among the junior cardiovascular faculty. There are currently three such programs: 1) The ACCF/Bristol-Myers Squibb/Sanofi Pharmaceutical Award in Acute Coronary Syndromes; 2) The ACCF/Harry B. Graf Award for Heart Disease Prevention; and 3)

The ACC/William F. Keating Award for Hypertension and Peripheral Vascular Disease. Applicants for these grants must be within five years of completion of training, have an academic rank of Instructor or Assistant Professor, and be members of the ACC. Three such awards of \$40,000 are given for one year of full-time research.

ACCF/Pfizer Post Doctoral Fellowships In Cardiology.

This program is in its second year and selects up to two recipients for grants of \$65,000 a year for three years. Each medical school or teaching hospital is eligible to nominate one candidate per year. The recipients must not hold full-time tenure track faculty positions during the first year and must be members of the ACC.

ACCF/Florida Heart Failure Fellowship Award. Initiated in 2004, this award aims to encourage cardiovascular trainees to pursue investigative careers in heart failure. A grant of \$40,000 is provided to an ACC member who is enrolled in a cardiovascular training program in Florida.

ACCF/General Electric Healthcare Career Development Awards in Cardiovascular Imaging. This is the most recent addition to the ACCF portfolio, and it will be awarded for the first time this year. It is the first award specifically directed toward cardiovascular imaging and is intended to foster the early development of research careers among junior faculty in the area of imaging technologies and targeted imaging agents. Two grants of \$65,000 a year for two years are provided solely for salary support for a full-time research commitment. Applicants must be within five years of completion of training, hold the academic rank of Instructor or Assistant Professor, and be ACC members.

The foregoing awards can support 14 developing physician-investigators per year. They stand as testimonies to the importance that the ACCF attaches to nurturing the researchers of the future. However, these grant programs are not the only efforts the College makes to encourage new physician-scientists. The ACCF supports at least two important awards that recognize achievement by junior investigators.

The Young Investigator Award (YIA) program represents a long-standing effort of the College to encourage beginning researchers. It is particularly near and dear to my own heart, since I was a YIA awardee (finalist, not winner) some years ago (more than I care to admit). The program exists in the form of a competition in which submitted papers are chosen for presentation at the scientific sessions. A panel of judges then selects winners who receive monetary



Figure 1. Parmley Prize winners 2004, Dr. Emanuele Barbato (left). Dr. Bernard De Bruyne (middle) was the senior author of Dr. Barbato's manuscript.

awards at the convocation. The program serves not only to stimulate research among junior faculty but also to recognize research achievement.

The "Parmley Prize," named after my predecessor as *JACC* Editor, is supported by Elsevier. The prize is awarded to the two young investigators (within five years of completing training) who are first authors of manuscripts judged to be the best papers published by such investigators in *JACC* that year (Figs. 1 and 2). The manuscripts are selected by the editors as best fulfilling the standard criteria for acceptance for publication. The awardees receive financial support to attend the scientific sessions, and the presentation of the award to both the investigator and training program director is made at the *JACC* editorial board meeting. The Parmley Prize also aims to encourage young physician-scientists and recognize their accomplishments.

In aggregate, the above grants and awards represent a major effort to address the dearth of cardiovascular trainees who are choosing careers in research. They provide an opportunity for trainees to experience research and acquire

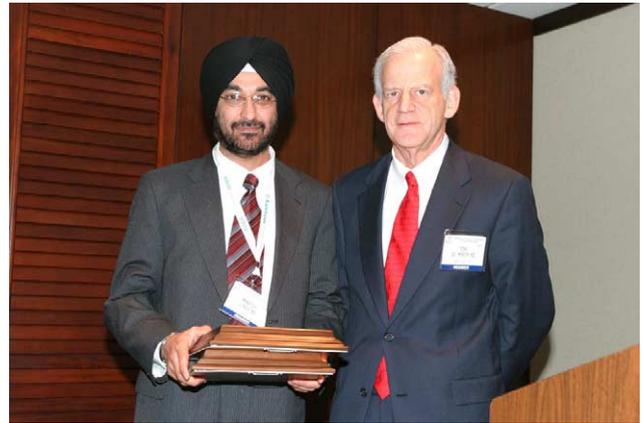


Figure 2. Parmley Prize winner 2004, Dr. Mandeep Singh.

investigative skills. They also present program directors and research mentors with the opportunity to attract fellows and junior faculty to careers as physician-scientists. Accordingly, these programs constitute precious resources that should be highly sought after. It would seem that all of the fellows and junior faculty members who entertain research as part of their careers should be motivated to compete for these awards. Moreover, it would seem reasonable for every program director and mentor to target winning these awards as a goal. The need for more physician-scientists is too important to receive anything but high priority. To paraphrase a sentiment from "The Godfather," the ACCF is making you an offer you can't (or shouldn't) refuse.

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REFERENCE

1. DeMaria AN. Clinical investigation . . . on impending crisis? *J Am Coll Cardiol* 2003;41:2100-1.