

VUB researcher selected for the Outstanding Achievement Award by the European Society of Gene & Cell Therapy

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Gene therapy has the potential to cure diseases by introducing functional genes into a patient's cells. In recent years, the field of gene therapy is gaining momentum thanks to numerous successes in clinical trials for the treatment of life-threatening genetic disorders and significant advances in R&D. Most recently, the first gene product was approved for the EU market. Prof. Thierry VandenDriessche, director of the Department of Gene Therapy and Regenerative Medicine at the Free University of Brussels, has been active in this field since its inception in the early 1990s. Earlier in his career, he had worked in the laboratories of gene therapy pioneer Dr. Michael Blaese (National Center for Human Genome Research, USA) and the late molecular biologist Dr. Marshal Nirenberg (National Heart Lung & Blood Institute, USA), who received the Nobel Prize in 1968 for unraveling the genetic code. In recognition of his research efforts towards advancing the field of gene therapy, Prof. Thierry VandenDriessche has now been awarded the Outstanding Achievement Award by the European Society of Gene & Cell Therapy, one of the top awards in the field. It is the first time this international award is given to a Belgian scientist. Together with Prof. Chuah, co-director of the Department, they have developed new and improved gene therapy approaches to cure genetic diseases. Their work was published in over 100 scientific publications, including several in top-tier journals. Their findings have broad medical implications for treating patients suffering from genetic diseases. VandenDriessche was delighted with this career award: "It serves as a recognition of our research in this field over the past 20 years. I want to thank all my colleagues and collaborators who had joined me on this exciting journey". VandenDriessche and Chuah hope it will serve as a catalyst to further invest in this promising field at the forefront of biomedical research. Their efforts spearheaded several international collaborations with other teams in Europe, USA, Canada and Japan. The Award will be given at the Presidential Symposium of the upcoming XXth Annual Conference of the European Society of Gene & Cell Therapy in Versailles this month (www.esgct.eu) one of the main events in the field.