

The MEDIC prize 2011

Intentions, procedures, candidates

1. Intentions

The MEDIC prize was created in 2010 with the intention to support a clinician/scientist at the outset of his/her career. In general, for clinically active physicians to continue to conduct high quality research after research training (i.e. graduation as a PhD) is quite difficult. As a result, basic research tends to be more and more conducted by straight PhD's and biomedical sciences continue to thrive in spite of an overall reduction of active MD input in the field.

Clinician/scientists, however, continue to play a significant role most notably in clinical but also in translational research. The practical implication of the adagium 'from bench to bedside and back' is that at the bedside end of this trail a competent clinician/scientist will team up with a basic scientist. Input of both is necessary to feed clinical needs into and provide clinical observations as starting points for basic studies. This justifies the choice for a clinician/scientist as potential MEDIC prize laureate.

The field of research in which the prize would be given was initially left open. The quality of the candidate should prevail over the subject of research proposed. For the MEDIC prize 2011 the applications were restricted to the field of cancer research, in line with the focus of the MEDIC funded consortium 'Tumour-host interaction'. However, within the field of cancer research the specific topics were not further specified.

In line with the above considerations, the call for applications for the prize 2011 was as follows

The MEDIC Foundation is a private foundation, seated in Geneva, of which one of the aims is to support high quality (bio)medical research on the borderline between basic sciences and clinical research – translational research as it has become known. Its primary interest is to support studies in the field of oncology. To this end, an international consortium has been created in which collaborative studies are conducted around the theme "Tumour-host interaction". The consortium is supported through grants which are peer reviewed. In addition travel grants facilitate exchange between the participating groups.

The MEDIC Foundation will support particularly promising young clinicians/scientists through the creation of an annual MEDIC prize. The prize will consist of CHF 200'000 over a two year period (CHF 100'000.- per year). The laureate can use the funds either to engage supporting personnel in his/her research group, take a sabbatical from clinical duties to intensify research activities or to fund a research fellowship abroad. The MEDIC Foundation calls for nominations or applications for the MEDIC prize 2011. The following regulations apply:

1. The deadline for nominations or applications is June 30, 2011. Nominations are accepted from candidates affiliated with (or to be affiliated with) FBM-UNIL, Faculty of Medicine UNIGE and the Jules Bordet Institute in Brussels.
2. The age limit for candidates is set at 35.
3. Applications have to be in the area of (translational) cancer research but not necessarily limited to the theme 'Tumour host interaction'.
4. Nominations or applications will consist of
 - a letter of motivation by the candidate
 - a full CV of the candidate

- two letters of recommendation (typically from a clinician stipulating clinical excellence and from a scientist stipulating the qualities of the candidate as a scientist).
- a letter of intent describing the research project the laureate will be conducting
 - of no more than 3000 words
 - containing background information, a working hypothesis, preliminary results and a crisp research plan
 - a budget proposal

5. Applications and nominations will be judged by an international jury.

2. The procedure followed

The announcement of the prize was submitted to the Deans offices of the Faculties of Medicine of UNIL and UNIGE and to the head of the department of Medical Oncology of the Jules Bordet Institute in Brussels with the request to circulate the announcement as widely as possible. The announced deadline was June 30. At that date 6 applications had been received. These were submitted to two experts in the appropriate field together with a standard score form. By the end of September for all candidates two reviews had been obtained. Two candidates did not meet the entry criteria, one candidate not being a clinician scientist and the other submitting a proposal not in the field of cancer research. The MEDIC coordinator then submitted all 4 applications with the obtained reviews to the members of the Scientific Advisor Board for final advice.

Early December the candidates were informed of the final status of their application.

3. The candidates, their project proposals

- Dr. Med. Christine Pot Kreis (Department of Pathology and Immunology UNIGE) : 'Oxysterols and IL-27 induced Type 1 regulatory T cells in Experimental Autoimmune Encephalitis'. This candidate was, however, not further considered as the proposal had no relationship to cancer research.
- Dr. Es Sciences Jean-Paul Rivals (Department of Head and Neck surgery, UNIL/CHUV) : 'Analysis and modulation of radio- and chemoresistance of head and neck cancer in order to improve immunotherapy'. This application was favorably reviewed by the external reviewers. This candidate was, however, not further considered as he did not qualify as a clinician/scientist (no Dr.Med., no clinical activities).
- Dr. Med. Lukas Flatz (Department of Dermatology, UNIL/CHUV) : 'Evaluation of a recombinant lymphocytic choriomeningitis vaccine for the treatment of melanoma'
- Dr. Med. Mathilde Gavillard (Department of Hematology, UNIL/CHUV) : 'Rac signaling in the nestin positive mesenchymal and perivascular components of the hematopoietic stem cell niche: relevance to leukemic stem cell localization and survival'

- Dr. Med., Dr. Es Sciences Nicolo Riggi (University Institute of Pathology, UNIL/CHUV) : 'The role of microRNAs in Ewing sarcoma cancer stem cells'.
- Dr. Med. Dr. Es Sciences Anita Wolfer (Department of Oncology, UNIL/CHUV): 'The role of MYC in cellular invasion and metastasis'. Dr. Wolfer is slightly older than the set age limit of 35 but in view of time it takes to become a clinician-scientist this criterium should not be too rigidly applied.

4. Final choice of the MEDIC Prize laureate 2011

All candidates obtained excellent assessments. As mentioned above, dr. Rivals and dr. Pot Kreis did not qualify for formal reasons.

As the external reviewers had only seen the application assigned to them, a further round of evaluation was deemed necessary. To this end, the members of the Scientific Advisory Board (prof. Marc Mareel, prof. Gerhard Christofori, prof. Holger Moch and prof. Ferdy Lejeune) were asked to review the four remaining projects, compare them, take the assessment of the external evaluators into consideration and propose the best candidate. The final decision as to the laureate for the 2011 MEDIC prize represents a weighted combination of the review scores obtained and the assessment by the Scientific Advisory Board.

5. As winner of the MEDIC prize 2011 we propose dr. Anita Wolfer. She has been informed of this choice. The other applicants have been informed of the fact that their application was not honored, and received the comments of the external reviewers (in general positive suggestions for improving the research project).

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Fred T Bosman
MEDIC coordinator