PRESS RELEASE
WINNERS ANNOUNCED
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MEDICINE

Topic: Prevention of Blindness

The King Faisal International Prize in Medicine was awarded for the Prevention of Blindness. It is estimated that 40 million people throughout the world are blind and that millions suffer from seriously impaired vision. The tragedy that blindness inflicts both on the individual and on society is, to a large degree, caused by factors that could be prevented.

Of the many individuals and organizations contributing to knowledge on the causes of blindness and the development of strategies for its prevention, one man has been outstanding in the quality and significance of his life's work. In recognition of his outstanding academic achievements and the contribution these have made to the benefit of mankind and enrichment of human thought, the Prize has been awarded to:

Professor Barrie Russell Jones

Dr. Jones is the Rothes Professor of Preventive Ophthalmology and Director of the International Centre for Eye Health at the Institute of Ophthalmology in Moorfields Eye Hospital, London. He is also Director there of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Prevention of Blindness and Trachoma. Born in New Zealand, he qualified first in Science in 1942 at Victoria University College, Wellington, and then in Medicine at the University of Otago in 1946. In 1952 Dr. Jones moved to London where he specialized in general and surgical ophthalmology, qualifying in surgery in 1955. His intense interest in research was soon directed towards the investigation of the infective agents that cause damage to the eyes, among them herpes virus and the trachoma agent. From the outset he endeavored not only to throw light on the nature of these agents as causes of blindness, but also on ways of countering them and their pathological effects. He played a seminal role in the 1960s in focusing attention both on the diagnosis and therapy of viral and chlamydial infections; he showed that blindness due, for example, to trachoma, can be prevented by appropriate
and inexpensive chemotherapy and, in many advanced cases, by surgery to arrest the development of blinding deformities. From his personal contributions has evolved a new and effective strategy for the prevention of blindness from this very widespread disease. In more recent years Dr. Jones has turned his attention to another major challenge, "River blindness" (onchocerciasis). His formulation of a strategy for the control of this and other causes of avoidable blindness in the Sudan is a classical model that will set the pattern for the prevention of blindness in many developing countries for years to come.

In the course of his studies in the laboratory, in the clinic and, above all, in the field, Dr. Jones became deeply convinced of the need to teach medical workers from the less privileged countries how to treat and prevent eye diseases and blindness in the absence of sophisticated and expensive facilities. His growing dedication to this principle led him to establish, in 1981, the International Centre for Eye Health, an institution that has become one of the leading teaching centres for physicians and medical auxiliaries from around the World, and that is now being emulated in other countries. In addition to his work in London, Dr. Jones continues to contribute internationally to the fight against blindness, both through the World Health Organization and as a much appreciated adviser to national health authorities.

Since 1951, Dr. Jones has been the sole or co-author of over 200 scientific papers, some 20 chapters in books and the co-author of a standard WHO reference work on the control of trachoma. Dr. Jones is 66 years of age.