

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
Of
KONRAD T. BEYREUTHER

Co-Winner of the 1997 King Faisal
International Prize for Medicine
(Degenerative Diseases of The Nervous System)

Your Royal Highness Prince Sultan ibn Abdul Aziz
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

The joint award of the 1997 King Faisal International Prize for Medicine is a great honour and special mark of distinction. I feel that this eminent award is the strongest recognition, support and motivation that a scientist can receive. It strengthens me to continue my research on degenerative diseases of the brain.

This Award is to me a recognition of a team effort which in my case includes not only my team in Heidelberg but also my colleague and friend

Professor Masters and his team in Melbourne. It is not just my work, it is the work of everyone in our both laboratories that is recognised today. I am most grateful to these people for their continuing and very successful research on understanding neurodegeneration of the brain in Alzheimer's patients. I am very proud that I can assure you that our coworkers share with Professor Masters and me the strong commitment to understand the causes of this devastating disease.

In Germany, my home country, more than one out of hundred individuals suffers from Alzheimer's disease. This fatal disorder forces, in regard to brain function, its patients back to the level of an infant depending on around-the-clock care. In Germany alone, the number of patients exceeds one million and this number will increase from year to year much in the same way as life expectancy goes up.

Understanding normal brain function and its diseases is the only strategy I can think of to find ways out of the dilemma that Alzheimer's disease will affect almost all humans sooner or later in their lives directly as a sick person or indirectly as a relative of a patient. I am most grateful to the King Faisal Foundation that this view of the eminent role of research on neurodegenerative diseases of the brain received strong support through this year's theme of the King Faisal International Prize for Medicine. Allow me to briefly elaborate on what I mean by stating this.

When the Award was made public by the King Faisal Foundation, I received a very positive response from politicians, scientists, and others from my country. This and the concomitant press response in turn created increased public awareness for research on Alzheimer's disease. The Prime Minister Erwin Teufel of my home state Baden-Wurttemberg, the Major of Heidelberg Beate Weber, the President of the German Science Foundation Professor Wolfgang Fruwald, the President of the Humboldt-Foundation Professor Reimar Lust, the Rector of the University of Heidelberg Peter Ulmer, the President of the Alzheimer Society of Germany Horst Laade and many people from at home and abroad have written to me on the occasion of this Award and emphasized the prime importance of research into Alzheimer's disease. They all agreed that understanding the underlying cause or causes of this disease is the most promising way towards effective prevention and therapy strategies in the future.

The Award to both Professor Masters and me would not have been possible without financial support from our countries. We are grateful to our citizens for their support. We also thank our colleagues, especially those in Germany, Australia and abroad which reviewed our grant applications and our manuscripts for their continuing support and encouragement.

I would like to thank my wife Ursula, my children Maria and Stefan, my parents, relatives, and friends for their trust, support, and understanding of my commitment to Alzheimer's research.

Finally, I give my sincere thanks to the King Faisal Foundation for the great honour to be awarded with and to share this year's King Faisal International Prize for Medicine.