

Speech of Professor
Robert Harry Purcell

Co-Winner of King Faisal International Prize
For Medicine 1998/1418H.

Saturday 14.2.1998 (17.10.1418A.H.)

Your Royal Highness Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz
Second Deputy Premier, Minister of Defense and Aviation
And Inspector General
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

Thank you for this great honour. I am particularly pleased because it is awarded for a lifetime of effort rather than for a single event. I am also pleased that I share the prize with Dr. Gerin, who was my collaborator and friend from the beginning of our careers in hepatitis research.

Although our interests have diverged somewhat in recent years, we continue to collaborate on studies of mutual interest. Those studies have taken us figuratively, if not literally, far afield, from our testing of a candidate hepatitis B vaccine in China to Dr. Gerin's discovery of a new strain of hepatitis D virus in the jungles of Brazil, and my studies of the epidemiology of hepatitis E virus in Pakistan. Our studies have taught us that, while cultures may differ from region to region, diseases and the suffering they cause often are universal and, furthermore, almost always difficult to conquer. Thus, it often takes a lifetime of hard work and persistence to make an impact on the public health. For example, the development of a single vaccine usually takes from 10 to 20 years and between US\$100 million and US\$200 million.

It is in this context of recognition for sustained efforts over a very long time that we humbly accept the King Faisal International Prize for Medicine for the Control of Communicable Diseases. We accept on behalf of all of our fellows, including Dr. Mario Rizzetto, a former recipient of this prize, our students, our colleagues and our families, all of whom contributed immensely and deserve to share in this honour.

We hope that our dedication and achievements are worthy of this prize, which honours King Faisal Ibn Abd Al-Aziz, a man revered for his lifelong commitment to the welfare of the Family of Man. His success can be seen in the marvelous medical advances made here in Saudi Arabia, two examples of which are of particular interest to me: the initiation of the control of hepatitis A through improved public health and the accelerating control of hepatitis B through vaccination.

My hope is that I will have the opportunity to witness the complete control of these and other diseases but, if I do not, that other dedicated individuals will carry on the battle. Perhaps they will even be honoured here in a future presentation of the King Faisal International Prize for Medicine, as Dr. Gerin and I are today.

Thank you.