

## Ulrich Sigwart

Winner of the 2004  
King Faisal International Prize for Medicine  
Sunday 21.3.2004 (30.1.1425H)

Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Medicine, as a humanitarian discipline, has one, and only one, mission, namely to help the sick and the wounded, regardless of background, gender, colour, race, religion, conviction, nationality, social and financial status, criminal record, motivation and behavior. Medicine has very clearly defined and focused goals, but it should be utterly disconnected from many of our daily inter-individual preoccupations such as the notion of superiority, greed, jalousie, fanatisme and the concept of worthiness.

Medicine plays a unique role in our world of many divisions. The *métier* of healing is universal. It is the same in our big cities, in wilderness and deserts, in all five continents, in countries under the most diverse governments and political regimes, from Australia to Greenland, from Argentina to Saudi Arabia. Medicine builds bridges across ideologies and cultural divides because its subject is simply the human being and not what mankind has engineered around it: *fences and divisions*.

Doctors from all corners of the world do speak the same language, the language of healing, even if sometimes it has to pass through the collimator of an interpreter. The science behind the physicians' action is, fortunately, equally universal. Medicine has all the prerequisites to be a metaphor in a world mostly geared to domination and suppression of the underprivileged.

I have spent much of my professional life with finding ways of improving blood flow through biological communication channels, in particular arteries in the human body. Arteries get blocked for different reasons, which results in a lack of nutritional support to the target organ, for example the heart or the brain. Reestablishing these communications, nowadays most often by implanting tiny support devices, stents, is essential for survival, as reestablishing communication is essential for the understanding and relations between people.

I am profoundly honored to have been selected to receive the King Faisal Prize for Medicine 2004. I shall do my utmost to use this gift to help improve communications between different organs of the human body, but equally between people.