

Acceptance Speech by
Professor Richard L. Berkowitz

Co-Winner 2012/1433H King Faisal International Prize
For Medicine

34th Ceremony
Tuesday 6/3/2012 - 13/4/1433H

Your Royal Highness Prince Salman Bin Abd Al-Aziz,
Minister of Defense,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests.

I am both honored and humbled to share this year's King Faisal International Prize in Medicine with Dr. Jim Bussel, my friend and colleague for almost 30 years. I would also like to publically acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Dr. Jan McFarland whose platelet laboratory at the Blood Center of Wisconsin was at the core of all of our clinical trials. In addition, I want to thank the hundreds of pregnant women who participated in our studies through the years, and their physicians throughout North America who enrolled them in our trials and managed them according to our research protocols.

I am truly grateful to the King Faisal Foundation for incepting this extraordinary award and making it attainable to anyone in the world whose work meets the lofty requirements of its founders. It is indeed

humbling to be awarded recognition from a field of worthy contenders from all over the planet with no constraints based on national origin, ethnic background or religious belief. It is also very fitting that this honor comes from that part of the world that kept the torch of Medicine burning during the dark ages in Europe when the flame that began in ancient Greece could certainly have died out. The Muslim world maintained the spirit of scientific investigation throughout those golden years of Islam and served as a critically important bridge to the current age of unparalleled advances in Medicine and all of the other sciences.

I am also grateful to the founders of the King Faisal Foundation for their very wise decision to grant awards to different specific disciplines in Medicine every year. In my opinion this serves to draw attention to medical issues of international importance that do not always share the limelight with disorders that may more immediately threaten the lives or health of the individuals who decide how to allocate research money in countries where that work is done. By rewarding efforts to understand problems as diverse as the management of degenerative joint disease and the genetics of obesity the Foundation has cast a very wide net indeed, and by including work in treating conditions prior to birth have made it possible for Dr. Bussel and I to be eligible for this years award.

The field of Fetal Medicine did not exist when I began my training in Obstetrics in the late '60s. The progress that has been made since then has been truly staggering, but it has primarily occurred in the area of improving our capacity to diagnose a large number of conditions adversely affecting the fetus in utero. Unfortunately, our ability to treat those conditions has not been nearly as impressive. I believe that physicians all over the world share a common ethos - namely to maximize the aid and comfort they provide to their patients, but the interventions available to Obstetricians for alleviating the problems they discover prior to birth have been frustratingly limited. These modalities include early delivery for conditions that make continuation of the pregnancy more dangerous for the fetus than placing it in a Newborn Special Care Nursery, and a small number of invasive therapeutic procedures. The work for which Dr. Bussel and I are being honored today represents the first successful minimally invasive therapy of a potentially devastating disease in utero. It is exceptionally rewarding to know that our work has led to the cure of a condition that has the potential to kill a fetus prior to it's birth, or result in life-long irreversible brain damage to a surviving child. It is my hope that work in the field of Fetal Medicine over the coming decades will produce many more examples of this form of therapy, and that the advances in our diagnostic capabilities over the last 40 years will be matched by our ability to adequately treat a growing number of the conditions we can detect prior to delivery.

We are all human beings, and the diseases that afflict us, as well as the scientific principles that govern the universe in which we live, are universal - not local or national. This is a major reason why the mission

of the King Faisal Foundation is so very important. By removing any barriers to being recognized for ones achievements in Medicine and Science the message is very clear - we are one global family and the progress made by any of us should accrue to the advantage of all of us. It is my fervent wish that someday every child treated for alloimmune thrombocytopenia, as well as all of the millions of other healthy children born anywhere on earth will grow up in a world that accepts the basic philosophy inherent in the King Faisal Foundation awards. A world in which we work and live together like the global family we truly are. A world in which a young person who grows up anywhere on earth will understand that the very finest way to spend his or her life is to strive to achieve the sort of accomplishment that is recognized by the award that my co-recipient and I are so very honored to receive today. Thank you.