

Acceptance Speech by Professor
Bjorn R. Olsen
2019 Co-Laureate of the King Faisal Prize
in Medicine
41st KFP Awards Ceremony
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I accept the great honor of receiving the King Faisal Prize for Medicine with a deep sense of gratitude, and I am delighted to share the honor with a professional friend, Steven Teitelbaum.

At the same time, I feel humble as I look back at the group of smart and dedicated students and postdoctoral fellows who contributed to discoveries that are celebrated by this award. The success of many projects aimed at better understanding skeletal development and maintenance in health and disease, can be traced back to the ability of students and postdoctoral fellows to not only listen to new ideas, but examine them in light of experimental evidence and argue about experimental action or disposal in the “grave yard” of discarded ideas. Another element of success has been the enthusiastic willingness of many trainees to dive into problems requiring techniques and understanding across different specialty areas of medical research.

Finally, as I go back even further, there are three additional fundamental elements that I believe have had substantial impacts on the training philosophy in my laboratory and for which I am extremely grateful.

First, as the older of two brothers, growing up in a home where love and respect for life and helping others was taken for granted, I was given freedom to pursue my fascination for discovering how everything works.

Second, as a second-year medical student at Oslo University I was given the chance, freedom and support to start an independent research project on the structure and functions of the extracellular matrix, in a department – the Anatomical Institute – known for its contributions to neuroanatomy. Lessons learned from developing my own project and correcting my own mistakes influenced my efforts to generate a good training environment in my laboratory, both at Rutgers Medical School and at Harvard.

Third, but not least, in acknowledging how substantial contributions to science necessitate efforts that can put heavy burdens on family life, I thank my former and current wife and children for the love, remarkable flexibility, understanding and forgiveness that have contributed to a discovery-stimulating environment both at home and in the laboratory.