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HHMI Announces Selection of 48 New Investigators

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) today announced the names of 48 scientists who have been selected in a national competition to be appointed as HHMI investigators. The scientists, from 31 institutions, were selected as assistant investigators or in the emerging field of computational biology.

They will join 305 HHMI investigators across the United States, a group whose honors last year included the Nobel Prize and the Lasker Award. Earlier this month, nine HHMI investigators were elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

"These new investigators are an incredibly talented group who have begun to make their mark on biomedical research," said Thomas R. Cech, who assumed HHMI's presidency on January 1. "We were looking for researchers who explore big questions and take risks people with that special quality that leads to scientific breakthroughs and medical advances."

Those selected include 12 in the field of computational biology, a new initiative by the Institute to pursue the growing opportunities at the confluence of biology and computing, in areas such as genomics, cognitive neuroscience and the folding of biomolecules. They also include a chemist, a physicist and for the first time an engineer, illustrating the breadth of fields that now contribute to biomedical advances.

The 48 new investigators must now be formally appointed. Assuming that all of them are able to accept the appointment, the HHMI scientific staff will increase to 353 investigators, based at 72 medical schools, universities and research institutes nationwide.

The Institute is a medical research organization that enters into long-term research collaboration agreements with universities and other academic research organizations, where its investigators hold faculty appointments. Under these agreements, HHMI investigators and their teams, who are employees of the Institute, carry out research with considerable freedom and flexibility in HHMI laboratories located on the various campuses. This model emphasizes "people, not projects" and differs from the grants approach used elsewhere. HHMI expects to spend between \$500,000 and \$1 million annually for each of its new investigators, including support to the host

institutions for graduate training, library resources and other needs.

The Institute invited more than 200 U.S. institutions involved in biomedical research to nominate outstanding biomedical scientists to be considered for appointment as HHMI investigators. By September 10, 1999, the closing date, 430 nominations had been received. The candidates were evaluated last month by a review committee of distinguished biomedical scientists meeting on the HHMI campus in Chevy Chase, Maryland, located just outside Washington, D.C. Following the recommendations of the advisors, 48 scientists were selected for potential appointment.

The initiative in computational biology builds on recent efforts by scientists to solve important biological problems with new computational tools. In March, for example, an international team led by HHMI's vice president for biomedical research, Gerald Rubin, announced the sequencing of the genome for the common fruit fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*.

The initiative complements the biomedical research that Hughes investigators have traditionally carried out in fields such as cell biology, genetics, immunology, neuroscience and structural biology. During the past few years, HHMI scientists have made significant discoveries related to heart disease, cancer, AIDS, diabetes, tuberculosis, obesity and many other medical problems. They also have developed important new research tools. Papers published by HHMI scientists are among those cited most often by other researchers.

HHMI's endowment is about \$13 billion and its total budget for the current fiscal year exceeds \$600 million. The Institute's biomedical research expenditures this fiscal year will total about \$460 million, including both national and local administrative costs, as well as related expenses such as the costs for laboratories and other facilities. In addition, HHMI will spend more than \$105 million this year on its grants program, which focuses on science education.

A list of the new investigators and their institutions follows.

Scientists Selected as HHMI Investigators, May 2000