

## **ONES program celebrates seventh year of excellence**

*By Eddy Ball*

For the scientists who oversee grants at NIEHS, things don't get much better than the meeting of the Outstanding New Environmental Scientist (ONES) awardees each year and the excitement of learning about new developments in their work. At this year's annual meeting May 20-21, there was even more reason than usual to cheer, as the program looked forward to its renewal after a yearlong hiatus.

The early career scientists are a select group of high achievers involved in cutting-edge research, funded across the spectrum of science supported by the NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training (DERT). In many ways, they represent the best examples of the transdisciplinary collaborative spirit that NIEHS tries to foster through its grants and strategic plan, and they embody the promise of the newest generation of environmental health science biomedical researchers.

"The ONES program not only provided the funding to establish your laboratories and careers, but also has a goal to build long-standing relationships with us here at NIEHS," NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., told the awardees in her opening remarks. "This is very important to us, not just for the goodwill that it builds, but for the continued vibrancy of environmental health research capacity."

The enormous advantages of being a part of the ONES program were acknowledged by the 27 awardees who made presentations at the meeting, as one after another, they credited NIEHS support for their accomplishments.

"Without this award, much of the work I'm going to present would be impossible," said Jason Bielas, Ph.D., echoing sentiments expressed by his fellow awardees.

### **An impressive showcase of young talent**

The program was organized around the six NIEHS program administrators who oversee research grants that support ONES awardees. The DERT scientists taking their turns at the podium included Kimberly McAllister, Ph.D., DNA repair and carcinogenesis; Cindy Lawler, Ph.D., neurotoxicology; Jerrold Heindel, Ph.D., early-life exposures; Claudia Thompson, Ph.D., mechanisms of toxicity; Sri Nadadur, Ph.D., indoor and outdoor air exposures, and nanotoxicology; and Les Reinlib, Ph.D., arsenic exposures.

The ONES program has made a total of 42 awards since 2006. Awardees from recent-year groups were joined by five early-career awardees with grants made in 2012. The reconstituted ONES program at NIEHS looks forward to a new batch of awardees in fiscal year 2014.

The presentations drew an audience of scientists from across NIEHS, to listen to and interact with awardees. Several trainees were on hand, many responding to an invitation by NIEHS Deputy Scientific Director Bill Schrader, Ph.D., to learn more about the kinds of research the Institute supports through DERT, and the directions which NIEHS funding is likely to proceed in the future.



*Birnbaum was clearly at home with the group she affectionately described as the "ONESies," when she told the audience, "This is one of my favorite events of the year.... You are really exceptional." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*Leading the list of presenters was Scott McCulloch, Ph.D., of North Carolina State University. A former trainee in the NIEHS DNA Replication Fidelity Group headed by Thomas Kunkel, Ph.D., McCulloch has used his ONES support to advance his research into "The Role of Human DNA Polymerase eta in the Response of Oxidative Stress." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*In Shreffler's absence, DERT grant administrators rotated as facilitators. McAllister, right, joined ONES awardee Yu-Ying He, Ph.D., photobiologist and former NIEHS trainee, of the University of Chicago, following her presentation on "Role of Autophagy in Response to UV [Radiation] Damage." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

## An honor role of accomplishments

The ONES coordinator, NIEHS Program Administrator Carol Shreffler, Ph.D., who also oversees training program grants, was unable to attend the meeting for the first time since ONES began in 2006. However, Birnbaum's remarks included some of the impressive metrics Shreffler had amassed for the introduction to a two-volume special issue of the *Journal of Biochemical and Molecular Toxicology*, (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jbt.2013.27.issue-1/issuetoc>) published this past January and February.

The special issue featured research publications and mini-reviews from nearly 20 of the ONES awardees, and was co-edited by 2008 ONES awardee Angela Slitt, Ph.D. In Shreffler's *introduction*, (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jbt.21445/full>) she offered some impressive statistics about the ONES program, in the areas of outstanding publications and productive collaborations; tenure and promotion; service on high-profile journal editorial awards; recognition by home universities, international professional societies, and even the U.S. President; and successful applications for grant funding beyond their ONES awards.

Shreffler's catalogue of honors clearly demonstrated that, in every respect, awardees have exceeded expectations of this unapologetically ambitious program.



Several of the NIH early-career awardees, including Joyce Ohm, Ph.D., of the University of North Dakota, joked about crashing the ONES celebration. Those in the newest group of talented young scientists were welcomed as ONES, because they are, in all but name, part of the chosen ones. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Lead researchers Steve Kleeberger, Ph.D., left, and Serena Dudek, Ph.D., were among many members of the NIEHS intramural community who turned out for the presentations. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



The DERT community, including DERT Deputy Director Pat Mastin, Ph.D., turned out in force to support the ONES awards and their grant administrators. Mastin worked closely with Shreffler to get the program off the ground in 2005. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Epidemiologist Patrick Ryan, Ph.D., draws upon his NIH early-career award to support his leadership of a cross-disciplinary study of "Neurobehavioral and Neuroimaging Effects of Traffic Exposure in Children," with colleagues at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



ONES research ranges widely, from basic research into DNA repair to human studies, such as the one led by Christy Porucznik, Ph.D., of the University of Utah, on the effects on offspring of parents' periconceptional exposure to such environmental chemicals as bisphenol A. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

### As the years go by — ONES awardees 2006-2012

The format has evolved since 2006, but the qualities that remain constant are the enthusiasm of the young scientists, the genuine pride of program administrators, and the *esprit de corps* that fosters fruitful collaborations across the extended family of NIEHS intramural and extramural researchers.

- 2006 — **NIEHS Celebrates ONES Award Winners**
- 2007 — **New ONES Grantees to Visit Institute in January**
- 2008 — **2008 ONES Awardees Speak at NIEHS**
- 2009 — **2009 ONES Awardees Speak at NIEHS**
- 2010 — **NIEHS selects 2010 ONES awardees**
- 2011 — **NIEHS celebrates five years of ONES research**
- 2012 — **Young EH researchers shine at ONES symposium**

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