Summary of Scientific Sessions 2011

Scientific Sessions is the American Heart Association’s largest gathering of scientists and healthcare professionals devoted to understanding and treating cardiovascular disease. Attendees descended on the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL, Nov. 12-16, to discuss the latest insights from the field of cardiovascular research. The five days were filled with numerous oral and poster presentations from students, fellows and many of the world’s leaders in the area of cardiovascular disease. The conference kicked off with numerous sessions devoted to early career attendees. One highlight of the opening day was an excellent session for students, fellows and early career investigators, titled “Navigating the Road to a Successful Career in Cardiovascular Research.”

It was organized by the Early Career Committee (ECC) of the BCVS. During the session, several established investigators provided personal experiences on topics such as handling the rigors of setting up a lab, navigating the NIH, writing a successful grant, dealing with success and failure, and balancing life and work. Students, fellows and early career investigators are encouraged to attend future sessions provided by the ECC and to visit the NIH and AHA websites for more information on opportunities for those in the early stages of their careers.

Highlights of the conference every year are the award competitions and the memorial lectures sponsored by the BCVS Council. The Louis N. and Arnold M. Katz Basic Research Prize and the Melvin L. Marcus Young Investigator Award are awarded to outstanding young investigators. Presentations of finalists were outstanding. Special congratulations to Li Qian, PhD, from the Gladstone Institute, for winning the Katz Award and for Melissa Thal, PhD, from Northwestern University, for winning the Marcus Award.

The BCVS Council also presented the George E. Brown Memorial Lecture and the Thomas W. Smith Memorial Lecture to two deserving council members. The George E. Brown Memorial Lecture was established in 1935. Elizabeth McNally, from the University of Chicago, delivered this year’s lecture on “The Interplay Between Heart and Muscle Disease.”

The Thomas W. Smith Memorial Lecture was established in 1997 to honor Thomas W. Smith, a pioneer in the application of biochemical, cellular and molecular approaches to investigate cardiac contractility. Gerald Dorn, MD, from Washington University, presented this year’s lecture, titled “Decoding the Cardiac Message.”

The AHA also recognizes a select group of prominent scientists whose contributions to research have advanced our understanding of cardiovascular disease and stroke. This year, two members of our Council were bestowed the Distinguished Scientist Award: Jeffrey Robbins, PhD, from Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, and Kenneth Walsh, PhD, from Boston University. Congratulations to Robbins and Walsh for this well-deserved honor. Also, congratulations to Howard Rockman, MD, from Duke University, for receiving this year’s BCVS Distinguished Achievement Award.

The Annual BCVS Dinner, held on Tuesday evening during Scientific Sessions, includes a business meeting to elect new officers, presentation of the Katz and Marcus Young Investigator Awards and an opportunity for members of our Council to come together and celebrate another year of outstanding contributions to cardiovascular research. Over the last few years, under the direction of our Council chair, Mark Sussman, PhD, FAHA, the BCVS Dinner has become a must-attend and much-talked-about event. The dinner at the Hard Rock Cafe Orlando included a live band and a performance by Danny Ware, a Michael Jackson tribute artist.

In closing, Scientific Sessions 2011 was a huge success. More importantly, the BCVS Council remains strong and active in this conference and the AHA in general.
Louis N. and Arnold M. Katz Award Finalists

The finalists were:
- Li Qian, PhD, Gladstone Institute in San Francisco, for “In vivo reprogramming of murine cardiac fibroblasts into induced cardiomyocytes”
- B. Julie He, University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa, for “Aldosterone enhances cardiac rupture after myocardial infarction through calcium/calcmodulin-dependent protein kinase II”
- Yasuhiro Maejima, MD, PhD, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark, N.J., for “Mst-1 mediated phosphorylation of beclin1 in its BH3 domain promotes beclin1-Bcl-2 interaction, thereby negatively regulating autophagy in the heart”
- Jing Wang, BWH, Harvard Medical School in Boston, for “Immunoglobulin E promotes vascular wall cell inflammatory molecule expression, apoptosis, and atherogenesis”
- Emmanuel S. Buys, Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, for “Genetic mapping of a modifier locus affecting blood pressure in soluble guanylate cyclase α1-deficient mice”

Melvin L. Marcus Award Finalists

The finalists were:
- Sebastiano Sciarretta, MD, UMDNJ in the New Jersey Medical School in Newark, N.J., for “High fat diet-induced obesity is associated with increased ischemia susceptibility due to deregulated activation of Rheb/mTORC1 pathway and inhibition of autophagy”
- Francesco S. Loffredo, MD, Harvard Stem Cell Institute in Cambridge, Mass., for “Circulating systemic factors from young mice reverse age-related cardiac hypertrophy”
- Nhat Tu Le, Aab Cardiovascular Research Institute in Rochester, N.Y., for “p90RSK inhibits C terminus of Hsc70-interacting protein (CHIP) ubiquitin E3 ligase activity and promotes cardiac apoptosis through ERK5-Ser 496 phosphorylation and association”
- Liya Yin, PhD, NEOUCOM in Rootstown, Ohio, for “Induced vascular progenitor cells derived from endothelial cells stimulate coronary collateral growth”
- Melissa A. Thal, PhD, Northwestern University in Chicago, for “In vivo differentiation of epigenetically reprogrammed mouse and human endothelial progenitor cells into cardiomyocytes enhances functional and anatomical post-infarct myocardial repair”