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Biomedical researcher Craig Beeson named as FRD 2015 Inventor of Year

*Beeson’s collaborative achievements include eye drops that can prevent blindness*

CHARLESTON, S.C. – Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Professor Craig Beeson, Ph.D., has earned 2015 Inventor of the Year honors from MUSC Foundation for Research Development for his leadership in creating molecular technologies for medical purposes, including eye drops to halt retinal degeneration that can lead to blindness.

“Dr. Beeson’s phenomenal discoveries promise real-world applications not only in the realm of eye disease and disorders but on several other intriguing fronts as well,” said FRD Executive Director Michael Rusnak.

Beeson is the third recipient of the Inventor of the Year award, which FRD initiated in 2013 to recognize innovators at the Medical University. His work with other MUSC researchers has resulted in three issued U.S. patents, with 22 other applications in various stages of preparation and prosecution worldwide. These patent filings represent several technology families, six of which have been licensed to companies.

In addition, Beeson co-founded two Charleston-based startup companies with assistance from FRD, which serves as MUSC’s technology transfer office.

MitoHealth, which Beeson launched with MUSC Professor Rick G. Schnellmann, Ph.D., seeks to find and develop molecular compounds that improve the health of mitochondria, which play a key role in cellular respiration. One of MitoHealth’s lines of research could lead to a landmark treatment for kidney failure.

Beeson also created Mitochem Therapeutics, Inc., with MUSC Professor Baerbel Rohrer, Ph.D. Backed by the Foundation for Fighting Blindness and other donors, they quickly discovered two molecules that protect mitochondria and as a result can slow or stop degeneration caused by retinitis pigmentosa, a group of eye disorders that threaten the vision of as many as 100,000 patients in the U.S. and 1.5 million worldwide. The resulting eye drops that they have developed could be tested on patients in clinical trials in as soon as 18 months.
Mitochem wants to take a similar approach to stopping age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which affects the vision of millions more people. Beyond that, Beeson sees potential applications for an array of disorders, including Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and chronic kidney disease. “We believe the technology can be applied to a wide variety of other degenerative diseases,” he said.

Beeson came to MUSC in 2002 from the University of Washington’s chemistry department because he wanted to have a direct impact on improving people’s lives through the development of new medical drugs and therapies. He now serves as a professor in MUSC’s Department of Drug Discovery and Biomedical Sciences and has taken on the role of core director of the MUSC/Seahorse Biosciences Academic Facility among other responsibilities. “MUSC has been very supportive, and the people at FRD have been very supportive,” he said.

About MUSC Foundation for Research Development
FRD has served as MUSC’s technology transfer office since 1998. During that period, FRD has filed patent applications on more than 350 technologies, resulting in over 140 U.S. issued patents. Additionally, FRD has executed more than 150 licenses and spun out more than 50 startup companies. MUSC startups have had products approved by the FDA and acquired by publicly traded corporations while attracting substantial investment dollars into South Carolina. Innovations from MUSC, including medical devices, therapies and software, are positively impacting health care worldwide. Please visit us online at frd.musc.edu

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