Dr. V. Kumaraswami Wins Kyelem Prize for Contributions to Eliminating Neglected Tropical Diseases

Posthumous award from the Coalition for Operational Research on Neglected Tropical Diseases (COR-NTD) recognizes pioneering achievements in the fight against elephantiasis.

Atlanta, Georgia (PRWEB) November 11, 2016 -- The late Vasantapuram Kumaraswami, MD, PhD (1950-2016), a pioneer in the fight against neglected tropical diseases, was awarded today the second annual Kyelem Prize at the annual meeting of the Coalition for Operational Research on Neglected Tropical Diseases, or COR-NTD. The award – received by Dr. Kumaraswami’s children Sameer and Manjusha Vasantapuram – recognized a lifelong commitment to bringing innovative solutions to the fight against debilitating neglected tropical diseases.

“It’s so fitting that Dr. Kumaraswami has been selected for this honor, which itself is given in memory of Dominique Kyelem,” said Julie Jacobson, MD, senior program officer with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, who won the inaugural Kyelem Prize in 2015 and presented this year’s award. “Both men achieved amazing strides to prevent disease in the developing world, and both did so with a spirit of humility and optimism.”

Dr. Kumaraswami worked for 40 years to eliminate lymphatic filariasis, which can cause a disfiguring condition called elephantiasis. He was the director-in-charge of the National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (formerly the Tuberculosis Research Centre) and the National Institute of Epidemiology, both institutes of the Indian Council for Medical Research. In these roles, Kumaraswami pioneered research on the impact of a medicine called ivermectin on lymphatic filariasis. He also contributed to the founding of the Global Programme to Eliminate Filariasis, and propelled stakeholders to expand mass drug administration programs in India and the South-East Asia region to control the disease. After he retired, he joined the Atlanta-based Task Force for Global Health in Atlanta for two years as associate director of international programs.

“Dr. Kumaraswami’s genius was not just his achievements – it was, rather, his ability to provide that spark, that environment, that opportunity for people to come together and work together to achieve great things, both at home in India and at home in the world,” said Eric Ottesen, MD, director of the Neglected Tropical Diseases Support Center, a program of The Task Force for Global Health that serves as the COR-NTD Secretariat.

The 2016 Kyelem Prize was announced at the close of the COR-NTD meeting in Atlanta. Nearly 400 researchers, program implementers, donors, and representatives of the World Health Organization convened for the meeting to identify key questions facing programs aimed at eliminating neglected tropical diseases such as lymphatic filariasis.

“Dr. Kumaraswami dedicated his life to ensuring that as many people as possible received treatment for lymphatic filariasis,” said Dr. Jacobson. “He leaves a large hole, but our coalition is determined to march forward and carry out both his and Dr. Kyelem’s legacy.”

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About the Coalition for Operational Research on Neglected Tropical Diseases: The Coalition for Operational Research on Neglected Tropical Diseases (COR-NTD) is a group of researchers, program implementers and
their supporters with the shared goal of optimizing NTD control and elimination. Supported by grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development to the Neglected Tropical Diseases Support Center at the Task Force for Global Health – which serves as the Coalition Secretariat – the aim of COR-NTD is to create new synergies within the operational research community for NTDs and align that research with the program needs. Learn more at http://www.ntdsupport.org/cor-ntd.

About The Task Force for Global Health: The Task Force for Global Health works to reduce the global burden of disease and build public health systems that serve all people. Founded in 1984 by global health pioneer Dr. William Foege, The Task Force consists of eight programs focused on neglected tropical diseases, vaccines, and health systems strengthening. It is affiliated with Emory University, headquartered in Decatur, GA, and has regional offices in Guatemala and Ethiopia. The Task Force received the 2016 Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize for its extraordinary contributions to alleviating human suffering. Learn more at http://www.taskforce.org.
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