

▶ Taking note

Industry researchers, executives, and drug products have been recognized at recent events.

BY ANN M. THAYER

Creating new pharmaceuticals is scientifically, financially, and organizationally challenging. The pharmaceutical industry and others have recently taken pause to recognize those who achieved success.

At its national meeting in Philadelphia, the American Chemical Society (ACS) named 13 scientists from four companies—3M, QLT, Schering-Plough, and Wyeth—“Heroes of Chemistry” for improving human health through the development and commercialization of new products. Heroes are nominated by companies and chosen by an ACS panel.

Two 3M researchers—John F. Gerster and Richard L. Miller—were recognized for the development of Aldara. In cream form, the immune-response modifier can be used to treat genital warts, one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases, and certain skin cancers and precancerous lesions.

QLT’s vice president for technology development, David H. Dolphin, was named a hero for leading the development of Visudyne, approved for treating wet age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in people over age 50. The photodynamic drug, a mixture of two verteporfin regioisomers, is injected into a patient’s arm and then activated in the eye with a non-thermal laser. Once activated, it affects abnormal blood vessels and stabilizes vision loss.

A team of five Wyeth researchers was acknowledged for directing work on Mylotarg, the first of a new class of antibody-targeted chemotherapies. Mylotarg has been approved for use against CD33-posi-

tive acute myelogenous leukemia. The team includes George A. Ellestad, Philip R. Hamann, Parimal R. Desai, Donald R. Miller, and Janis Upeslacis. The antibody–drug conjugate (gemtuzumab ozogamicin) uses a proprietary linker technology to combine an antibody that binds specifically to the CD33 antigen and a potent antitumor antibiotic, calicheamicin.

The celebrated team behind Schering-Plough’s Zetia, the first in a new class of cholesterol-lowering drugs, consisted of Duane A. Burnett, John W. Clader, Brian A. McKittrick, Sundeep Dugar, and Stuart B. Rosenblum. Zetia inhibits cholesterol absorption in the intestine, unlike statins, the leading class of anticholesterol drugs introduced more than 15 years ago, which prevent cholesterol production in the liver.

Zetia was also among compounds recognized in August at the Third Annual Pharmaceutical Achievement Awards, organized by IBC USA Conferences.

It won in the cardiovascular category, while Bristol-Myers Squibb and Otsuka America Pharmaceutical’s schizophrenia drug Abilify was the central nervous system compound of the year. The anti-asthma monoclonal antibody drug Xolair, from Genentech, Novartis, and Tanox, led the inflammation and immunology category. Millennium Pharmaceuticals’ Velcade, a proteasome inhibitor, and AstraZeneca’s Iressa, an epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) tyrosine kinase

inhibitor, tied as leading oncology products.

The Pharmaceutical Achievement Awards are selected by a review committee of more than two dozen executives from small and large pharmaceutical research organizations, academicians, and business and legal professionals. The group gave the Lifetime Achievement Award to Jackson B. Hester, who retired from Pfizer in 2003.

Also on the business side, Daniel Vasella, CEO of Novartis, was named pharmaceu-

tical executive of the year. Pfizer’s takeover of Pharmacia garnered the merger and acquisition deal of the year award. Aventis’s \$510 million alliance with Regeneron Pharmaceuticals to develop and commercialize Regeneron’s vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) trap anti-angiogenesis compound was cited as licensing deal of the year.

For scientific achievement, Frank L. Douglas, chief scientific officer at Aventis, and Robert R. Ruffolo, Jr., president of Wyeth Research, tied for the chief scientific officer of the year.

Academic scientists of the year were Craig Mello, professor in the University of Massachusetts Medical School’s program in molecular medicine, and Andrew Fire, professor of pathology and genetics at Stanford University School of Medicine. They were recognized for developing RNA interference technology.

GlaxoSmithKline took home an award for its work in disease prevention and education, while Novartis got the Good Citizen Award for opening its Tropical Disease Institute in Singapore. And the William J. Clinton Presidential Foundation was recognized for advancing the cause of worldwide health through its HIV/AIDS initiative. ■



Vasella



Ruffolo



Douglas