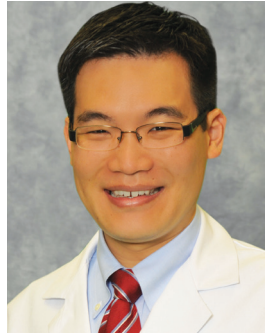


Two Methodist cardiologists honored with prestigious awards at ACC conference



Christie Ballantyne, M.D.



C. Huie Lin, M.D.

Two cardiologists with the Houston Methodist DeBakey Heart & Vascular Center were recently honored with prestigious awards at the American College of Cardiology (ACC) conference in San Francisco.

Dr. Christie Ballantyne was presented with the Distinguished Scientist Award for Basic Science. The award honors those who have made significant contributions to the advancement of scientific knowledge in the field of cardiovascular disease.

"It's a great honor to receive this award because, when I first started in 1988, people were having a hard time figuring out why a cardiology fellow was doing work in a genetics lab," said Ballantyne, director of the Center for Cardiovascular Disease and Prevention, co-director of the Lipid Metabolism and Atherosclerosis Clinic at Houston Methodist Hospital and a professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. "My focus has been on the role of inflammation and cell adhesion molecules in vascular disease and it's amazing to see how the field has grown."

Ballantyne's research has been in the area of atherosclerosis vascular disease, which includes pharmaceutical studies to assess the efficacy and benefits of lipid-lowering drug therapy.

Dr. C. Huie Lin was also honored with the CV Translational Research Award given by the ACC Foundation and International Society of Cardiovascular Translational Research. The \$70,000 grant is designed to give clinical cardiologists the time to do translational research.

"Junior interventional cardiologists don't usually have time to do translational research, so it's very exciting to be given the opportunity to find new ways to bring what we learn from our patients back to the bench and then take it from the bench back to the bedside again," said Lin.

Both awards were handed out at the ACC convocation ceremony on March 11.

Two biomarkers predict increased risk for "silent" strokes

Two biomarkers widely being investigated as predictors of heart and vascular disease appear to indicate risk for "silent" strokes and other causes of mild brain damage that present no symptoms, report researchers from Houston Methodist Hospital and several other institutions in an upcoming issue of *Stroke* (now online).

The researchers found high blood levels of troponin T and NT-proBNP were associated with as much as 3 and 3.5 times the amount of damaged brain tissue, respectively. The findings are part of the large-scale Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study, funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

"The concept of prevention is expanding," said principal investigator Christie Ballantyne, M.D., director of the Center for Cardiovascular Disease Prevention at Houston Methodist Hospital. "It's not good enough to simply do a few tests and try to assess risk for heart attack. What we need to do is assess the risk for heart attack, stroke, heart failure and also asymptomatic disease so we can start preventive efforts earlier. Waiting to correct problems until *after* a symptomatic stroke may be too late."

One possible outcome is that patients determined to be in high-risk groups could be started on anti-stroke medications sooner.

In another ARIC paper published two months ago in *Stroke*, Ballantyne and co-authors reported a strong association between blood levels of troponin T and NT-proBNP and more severe instances of stroke, called symptomatic stroke. The current study looked at the two biomarkers and "subclinical," asymptomatic events in the brain that are usually caused by a lack of blood flow.

"Taken together, these two papers show the biomarkers are effective at identifying people who are likely to have mild brain disease and stroke well before damage is done," said Ballantyne, who also is a Baylor College of Medicine professor. "This hopefully will give doctors more time to help patients take corrective steps to protect their brains."

For the subclinical brain disease study, researchers gleaned data from about 1,100 patient volunteers who agreed to have blood drawn and two MRI scans eleven years apart to look for silent brain infarcts and also white matter lesions (WMLs) caused by chronic inflammation.

Statistical analysis showed a strong relationship between high NT-proBNP and the likelihood of brain infarcts and WMLs. Study participants with the highest levels of NT-proBNP had as much as 3.5 times the number of brain infarcts as participants with low NT-proBNP levels, and more WMLs. Those with the highest levels of troponin T had as much as 3 times the number of brain infarcts and more WMLs.

"The highly sensitive troponin T test we used is not approved for general clinical use in the United States yet, but the NT-proBNP test is just now starting to be used more widely beyond making a diagnosis for heart failure," Ballantyne said.