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UCT academic wins international award for outstanding work on TB

Professor Valerie Mizrahi, the director of the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IIDMM) at the University of Cape Town, has been awarded the coveted Grand Prix Christophe Mérieux Prize by the *Institute de France* in Paris.

The 500,000 euro award, made by the Institute's Academy of Sciences, is considered a highly prestigious international accolade and will be presented to Mizrahi at a ceremony in Paris on 5 June.

Member of the Academy of Sciences, Pascale Cossart, has paid tribute to Mizrahi's work.

"What characterizes Valerie Mizrahi's work is not only her excellent research on *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and tuberculosis, but also her very active involvement in the tuberculosis community in South Africa, on the African continent and internationally."

The Academy of Sciences, which makes awards to the most meritorious scientists and promising research projects, also lauded Mizrahi for her special qualities in mentoring students, particularly those engaged in TB research.

"Valerie's work is characterized by an incredible ability to engage with students in research, through supervising and coaching. The way she does this is widely acknowledged," said Cossart.

Mizrahi said: "For me the most gratifying part of it is that the award committee recognized my commitment to, and passion for developing people. I've trained so many young scientists – and this award is for them."

Mizrahi plans to use most of the prize money on hiring senior researchers who are

able to bring new skills to the laboratory that she runs with IIDMM colleague, Digby Warner, particularly in chemical biology and bioinformatics.

“Given the shortage of career opportunities for outstanding early-career scientists who are interested in pursuing a career in biomedical research in South Africa, I believe this would be a great investment.

“I also plan to purchase some laboratory equipment and provide opportunities for students from our laboratory to travel abroad for specialized training.”

Prior to joining UCT in 2011 as director of the IIDMM, Mizrahi was based at the University of the Witwatersrand and National Health Laboratory Service in Johannesburg.

The IIDMM aims to be a centre of excellence where world-class scientists work together to tackle diseases of importance in Africa. As the largest postgraduate research institute at UCT, the IIDMM is a major training hub in Africa for biomedical, clinical and public health researchers, and currently hosts approximately 150 postgraduate students and 80 postdoctoral fellows in more than 20 multi-investigator research groupings.

The IIDMM has a very strong thrust in TB research, hosting the South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI), the Clinical Infectious Diseases Research Initiative (CIDRI), the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre (DTHC), and the UCT node of the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence for Biomedical TB Research.

The Institute of France consists of five academies with a rich and long history spanning a few centuries. It values independent thinking and expanding the horizons of research. The Institute’s Academy of Sciences was founded in 1666.

ENDS

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