

新聞稿 PRESS RELEASE

TO NEWS EDITOR
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NOBEL LAUREATE ON AGING AND DEMENTIA

Nobel Laureate Dr. D. Carleton Gajdusek, from the National Institutes of Health in America, will deliver a public lecture tomorrow on dementia -- a brain disease especially common among the elderly.

In western countries, dementia strikes nearly one out of two of those over 80-year-old, one out of five of those over 75-year-old and one of ten of those over 65-year-old.

While accurate statistics are not available in Hong Kong, it has been estimated that about one-third of those aged over 85-year-old and one-fourth of those aged over 75-year-old suffer from the disease -- which is causing increasing social concern due to the aging of the local population.

The first in a series of lectures to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the lecture on "Dementia, Aging and Amyloidosis" is expected to draw hundreds of doctors and related professionals, students as well as members of the public. Presented by the University's Faculty of Medicine, the lecture will start at 4:30 p.m., January 19 (Tuesday), in the Sir Run Run Shaw Hall at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in Shatin.

Dementia is a medical term for the brain disease which progressively erodes one's intellectual functions. It starts off with mild symptoms of failing memory and loss of language ability. The patients might end up lying stiff in bed with eyes open, totally unaware of the happenings around him.

Amyloid is an abnormal protein commonly found in patients, especially those affected by Alzheimer's disease -- a common form of dementia which account for 40 to 60 per cent of all cases.

Renowned for his research on infectious diseases, Dr. Gajdusek is presently Director of the Study of Child Growth and Development and Disease Patterns in Primitive Cultures, and the Laboratory of Slow, Latent and Temperate Virus Infections of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Institutes of Health, USA.

He was honoured with the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1976 for the discovery, through years of research, of the infectious agent causing the dementia-related fatal disease of kuru among the cannibalistic Fore people in New Guinea.

The Fore was a people with stone age culture who practised ritual cannibalism as a mark of respect for newly-dead relatives. During their rituals, Fore women and children smeared victim's brain and viscera over their bodies and faces, and they were found to suffer from a higher incidence of kuru, which caused shivering-like tremor, dementia and eventually death.

While working as a visiting investigator in Australia in 1957, Dr. Gajdusek was attracted by medical reports about this strange disease, and he stayed 12 months at the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea to study it.

For his outstanding achievements, Dr. Gajdusek was awarded honorary doctorates by 12 universities and institutions. He was also the recipient of numerous prizes and medals, including the Nobel Prize and the Stuart Mudd Award presented by the World Academy of Art and Science and International Union of Microbiological Societies.

Dr. Gajdusek's experience and expertise cover a wide range of subjects and specialties, including biophysics, physical chemistry, paediatrics, microbiology, virology, immunology, anthropology and neurology. He is fluent in 12 languages, and has a large family of 54 children whom he adopted in New Guinea and Micronesia.

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, the Chinese University will stage a series of Anniversary Lectures by distinguished scholars including Professor Albert Henry Halsey, from University of Oxford; Professor Tse-tsung Chow and Professor Richard P Bagozzi, from the U.S.; Professor Lotfi A Zadeh, Father of "Fuzzy Logic"; Professor Kenneth J Arrow, Nobel Laureate in Economic Science; and Professor Harold Walter Kroto, a renowned scholar in Chemistry and Molecular Sciences.

Sponsored by the Wei Lun Foundation, all the Anniversary Lectures are open to the public.

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Dear Editor,

You are cordially invited to send a reporter and/or a photographer to cover the above lecture. Should you be interested in interviewing Dr. Gajdusek, please contact Mr Ali Li at 6097293 or Mrs Shirley Kwok at 6097294.