



PRESIDING OVER THE CEREMONY, HIS MAJESTY KING FELIPE VI
DEFENDED THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN RESEARCH IN MEDICAL
SCIENCES

THE ABARCA PRIZE IS A NEW INTERNATIONAL REFERENCE POINT IN THE RECOGNITION OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

- Professor Jean-Laurent Casanova has focused his research for more than 30 years in the field of infectious diseases in humans – including COVID-19, and he has solved the so-called “infection enigma”, marking a paradigmatic shift in the approach to infectious diseases throughout the world.
- The award ceremony brought together 120 personalities from science, research, health management, government, and business sectors in Spain.

Madrid, October 27, 2021: His Majesty King Felipe VI presided over the ABARCA PRIZE award ceremony, the Dr. Juan Abarca International Prize for Medical Sciences, which in its first edition was awarded to Professor Jean-Laurent Casanova, researcher at Rockefeller University Hospital and director of the St. Giles Human Genetics and Infectious Diseases Laboratory (New York), professor at the University of Paris and director of the Necker Branch Human Genetics and Infectious Diseases Laboratory – Imagine Institute; Investigator at Howard Hughes Medical Institute; collaborator at the National Institute of Health of France; and member of the international consortium COVID Human Genetic Effort. Professor Jean-Laurent Casanova received his award in recognition of his more than 30 years of research in the field of infectious diseases in humans.

His Majesty the King of Spain said: “The establishment of this award is an event of enormous significance because it facilitates and enhances the dialogue between science and industry. A just society is one that knows how to recognize those who pour all their efforts into improving the lives of others and who have a real impact on society. This award is named after Dr. Juan Abarca Campal, whose professional vocation has been aimed at serving and improving the lives of his fellow citizens. The doctor and his family have understood that entrepreneurship means, above all, generating value in society, and I congratulate them for their firm commitment, will and steadfastness that are manifested today with this prize”.

The ABARCA PRIZE award ceremony was also attended by the Minister of Health, Carolina Darias San Sebastián; the leader of the Opposition, Pablo Casado Blanco; the second vice president of the Congress of Deputies, Ana Pastor Julián; the Minister of Health of the Community of Madrid, Enrique Ruiz Escudero; and the deputy mayor of the Madrid City Council, Begoña Villacís Sánchez.

Endowed with 100,000 euros and an accrediting diploma, the award, now in its first edition, stands as a clear model in the recognition of medical research. The prize had an international jury made up of Dr. Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of the medical journal *The Lancet*; Professor Silvia G. Priori, Italian cardiologist and researcher of the National Centre for Cardiovascular Research (CNIC) and former president of the European Heart Rhythm Society; the Spanish palaeontologist Juan Luis Arsuaga, director of the UCM-Carlos III Health Institute for Human Evolution and Behaviour Joint Centre and co-director of the Sierra de Atapuerca sites; and Professor Federico de Montalvo, Doctor of Law and president of the Bioethics Committee of Spain since 2019. The president of the jury was Professor Alberto Muñoz, renowned researcher of the Higher Council for Scientific Research (CSIC) at the Institute of Biomedical Research of Madrid (IIB).

Professor Jean-Laurent Casanova, winner of the award, thanked his nominator, his family, the centres where he carries out his research work, and the entire global scientific community, who have done an incredible job in the fight against COVID-19. He said: “Many awards recognize the creation of vaccines, antibiotics, and treatments for new diseases, but never before has an international and multidisciplinary award recognized what is known as the infection enigma, which is the beginning of the solution for many health problems”.

Once the award ceremony was over, Dr. Abarca, on behalf of the Abarca Cidón family, protagonists of the Abarca Prize, said: “The ABARCA PRIZE fulfils the desire to recognise Dr. Juan Abarca Campal’s important healthcare journey. He has always insisted that the ultimate goal of the doctor is unequivocally the well-being of the patient. There is no better way to honour this idea than to recognise a medical researcher whose career and findings have had such a remarkable impact on the preservation of life. It is an honour that Professor Casanova accompanies the figure of our father, Dr. Abarca Campal, as the winner in this first edition”.

Professor Jean-Laurent Casanova, pioneer in the study of infectious diseases

Professor Jean-Laurent Casanova’s research has been directed at the characterisation of the immunological alterations responsible for the susceptibility and aggressiveness of infectious diseases. He has studied how the mutation of certain genes and the generation of autoantibodies determine clinical manifestations and the results of infections by viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites.

Professor Casanova is a pioneer, and his work has been essential for a paradigmatic shift in the medical understanding of how infectious diseases develop. He has described the mechanism through which some people are resistant to infection, while others suffer with more or less seriousness, and others still die.

The discovery of innate monogenic immune system errors linked to infection response has contributed to solving the so-called “infection enigma”. At the same time, a new vision of research has been established both from the etiopathogenic point of view and from the perspective of the treatment of diseases; practical applications to the global population are wide and include examples as important as COVID-19, tuberculosis and viral encephalitis.

The impact of Professor Casanova’s work of more than three decades definitively changes the management of infectious diseases.

About the ABARCA PRIZE

The International Prize for Medical Sciences ABARCA PRIZE was established in 2020 with the purpose of shining an international spotlight on the impact of medical scientific advances and innovations. The award can be granted to an individual, anywhere in the world, whose scientific research has significantly contributed to the improvement of public health.

The ABARCA PRIZE is inspired by the permanent commitment to the progress and health of people, the values intrinsic to Doctor Juan Abarca throughout his entire professional career.

For more information:

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