Contag to receive 2017 Britton Chance Biomedical Optics Award

Molecular imaging pioneer Christopher Contag of Michigan State University has been named the recipient of the 2017 Britton Chance Biomedical Optics Award from SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics.

The prestigious award is presented annually in recognition of outstanding lifetime contributions to the field of biomedical optics through the development of innovative, high-impact technologies. The award was announced Oct. 31, 2016.

Contag will accept the award at SPIE Photonics West in San Francisco in January, and give a talk on his work during the BIOS Hot Topics session. A frequent contributor to the event, he has authored more than three dozen proceedings papers in the SPIE Digital Library, and nearly 20 articles in the Journal of Biomedical Optics published by SPIE.

Contag joined MSU on Nov. 1 as the inaugural director of the Institute for Quantitative Health Science and Engineering, and chairperson of the Department of Biomedical Engineering in MSU’s new $69.8 million Bio Engineering Facility. Grand opening ceremonies for the 130,000-square-foot facility were Oct. 27, marking the start of a new era of scientific research at MSU. For more on MSU’s new Bio Engineering Facility: http://bit.ly/2e35WYN
Contag previously served as associate chief of Neonatal and Developmental Medicine at Stanford University, director of Stanford’s Center for Innovation in In Vivo Imaging (SCI3), and co-director of the Molecular Imaging Program at Stanford (MIPS). He was also a professor in the Departments of Pediatrics, Radiology, and Microbiology and Immunology, and a member of Bio-X faculty for interdisciplinary sciences, and the Immunology faculty.

Contag's lab was the first to use biological sources of light to image key biological processes in living mammals. This work included the first in vivo bioluminescent images (BLI) of bacterial infection, gene expression patterns, stem cell biology, cancer growth and transplantation biology of solid organs and responses to therapy.

His laboratory now develops macroscopic and microscopic optical imaging tools that have enabled in vivo studies of drug targets and agents such that every large drug company now uses BLI to accelerate drug development.

In its citation, the SPIE Awards Committee commended Contag for his significant changes to the way we study biology in living tissue through his invention of in vivo optical imaging using bioluminescent and fluorescent reporters. This invention is one of the most significant advances in biomedical research in recent history, the citation noted.

“Dr. Contag’s passion for unraveling cancer biology and his ability to recognize unmet needs and create new tools to solve them makes him an extraordinary candidate for the Britton Chance Biomedical Optics Award,” said Anna Moore, professor of Radiology and director of the Molecular Imaging Laboratory at Massachusetts General Hospital, in support of Contag’s nomination.

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