

# Otto Naegeli Prize awarded to Pierre-Alain Clavien

*Daniel Scheidegger*

Every two years the Otto Naegeli Prize is awarded to a scientist working in Switzerland who has made outstanding contributions to biomedical and/or clinical research and is likely to continue doing so. At its November 2007 meeting, the Otto Naegeli Award Committee of the Bonizzi-Theler Foundation decided to award this year's Prize to Pierre-Alain Clavien, Professor of Surgery at the University of Zurich.

This is the first time that the Otto Naegeli Prize, worth CHF 200,000 and among the most important scientific distinctions in our country, is awarded to a clinician in surgery or any other perioperative discipline.

This year's award winner is one of the very few surgeons in the world who is not only an outstanding clinician and expert on liver surgery and liver transplantation, but also an internationally recognised researcher who has made substantial contributions to our understanding of liver ischaemia, reperfusion and regeneration.



**Figure 1**  
Pierre-Alain Clavien.

Pierre-Alain Clavien was born in Geneva in 1957, where he went to school and later studied medicine. On completing medical school in 1982 he decided to specialise in surgery. After two missions for the Red Cross in Peru and El Salvador, he began his surgical training in Morges. Although German has never been his language of predilection, he wished to broaden his training in as many surgical subdisciplines as possible and so decided to take up a two-year residency at the Department of Surgery in Basel. Shortly after his return to Prof. Rohner's surgical clinic in Geneva he became a staff surgeon.

Even as a young resident he was keenly interested in research, and published an impressive range of papers in prestigious journals (*American and British Journals of Surgery* and *The Lancet*, among others) during his training. In Basel he was the principal investigator in a clinical trial on the treatment of mesenteric infarction. Having had the privilege of working with him at that time, I will never forget how he always managed to be present when a new patient was included in the study, despite his customarily long working hours and regardless of whether he was on or off duty.

Certified as a surgeon in Switzerland, he decided to obtain formal training in research and enrolled in a PhD programme at the Institute of Medical Science and the Department of Immunology of Toronto University. In 1992 he completed his doctoral thesis "Mechanisms of Preservation and Reperfusion Injury in Liver Allograft."

Since taking up his fellowship in clinical hepatobiliary and liver transplantation at the Department of Surgery, Toronto General Hospital and Hospital for Sick Children in 1991, his clinical activities and research have focused on liver surgery and more specifically on liver transplantation.

In 1994 he became an Assistant Professor of Surgery and Director of the Liver Transplant Programme at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Only three years later he was promoted to Associate Professor and Director of the entire Division of Transplantation. He left Durham in 2000 as full professor to take over the chair of the Visceral and Transplant Surgery Department, University Hospital of Zurich.

Pierre-Alain Clavien's list of publications is not only impressive by the number of articles in leading journals but also by their scope, covering both basic and pure clinical research. It is certainly a unique distinction that his team in Switzerland was able to publish an article on "Strategies for safer liver surgery and partial liver transplantation" as a Medical Intelligence article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and as a basic research article in the journal *Science*, where they demonstrated that platelet-derived serotonin is involved in initiating liver regeneration.

As a surgeon performing liver transplantation he is regularly confronted with the shortage of donor organs, and hence his team's research has a specific goal: what can be done to improve the tissue condition of the liver after ischaemia in order to improve patient outcome after transplantation? And how can the rate of liver regeneration be stepped up to render the living donor programme even more successful? Among scientists there is an oft-heard complaint that most clinicians do not understand their language. Pierre-Alain Clavien is a successful clinician who not only understands their language, but is also able to publish in their domain! Since he remains a clinician, the research questions he asks are always relevant to his patients.

Back in Switzerland, his ambition was not only to head an excellent clinical department but also to improve the academic importance of surgery by introducing special training programmes for junior surgeons. Chairing an internationally renowned surgical department and also recognised as a leading researcher in that area, he is a role model who is able to attract faculty members who share his vision.

Pierre-Alain Clavien is still trying to find an ideal career planning solution to enable young members of his profession to conduct research and publish papers while learning to be skilled surgeons. The academic performance of surgeons in our country is still of minor importance to their future careers. His idea of also introducing tenure track positions in surgery could eventually improve academic output and become a model for other professions in the field of perioperative medicine.

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