

MED-EL Founder and CEO Dr. Ingeborg Hochmair to Receive Prestigious Lasker Award for Development of the Modern Cochlear Implant



September 9, 2013 - [Innsbruck, AUSTRIA] – Worldwide hearing implant leader MED-EL Medical Electronics today announced that Founder and CEO Ingeborg Hochmair, PhD, has been selected to receive this year's prestigious *Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award* for the development of the modern cochlear implant, a device that restores hearing to individuals with severe-to-profound deafness through electrical stimulation of the auditory nerve. She will share the award with Graeme M. Clark (Emeritus, Univ. of Melbourne, Australia) and Blake S. Wilson (Duke University, NC, USA). This highly-respected scientific award honors scientists whose contributions have improved the clinical treatment of patients. The award ceremony will take place in New York City on Friday, September 20, 2013.

Ingeborg Hochmair, a PhD in electrical engineering, is being recognized for her early contributions to the field of cochlear implants starting with the development of the world's first multi-channel microelectronic cochlear implant that was implanted in Vienna in 1977. This implant included a long, flexible electrode, which could, for the first time, deliver electric signals to the auditory nerve along a large part of the cochlea, the snail-shaped inner ear. With a modified version of this device, the next milestone in cochlear implant development was reached in 1979: the understanding of words and sentences without lip-reading in a quiet environment via a small, body-worn sound processor. The young recipient, a pioneer herself because she devoted much of her time to cochlear implant research, has enjoyed open speech understanding via a small processor for the past 34 years. Intense and continuous innovation followed, including the development of the world's first behind-the-ear (BTE) cochlear implant audio processor in 1991.

The next major advancement was the development of a high stimulation rate cochlear implant designed to faithfully implement a new speech coding strategy developed by Blake Wilson. From 1994 forward, this device took its users to the next level of performance. It became the first device with which the majority of postlingually deaf adults achieved more than 50% monosyllabic word understanding within 6 months after implantation as demonstrated in a multicenter clinical trial. This meant that the majority of those implanted could now have conversations over the phone about unknown topics with an unfamiliar speaker.

Respect for the cochlea and its delicate structures have guided Dr. Hochmair's research and development activities towards a highly flexible electrode array preserving the delicate structures of the cochlea despite deep insertion into the cochlea.

During recent years, Dr. Hochmair and Wilson have collaborated on current topics such as the benefit of bilateral implantation, combined electric and acoustic stimulation, and of cochlear implants for single-sided deafness.

The cochlear implant was, and remains, the first replacement of a human sense, the sense of hearing. Dr. Hochmair's intellectual rigor, pioneering spirit, and life-long drive toward excellence have transformed the lives of nearly 100,000 individuals around the world.

"Many of these achievements were attained with the shared commitment of my husband and closest collaborator, electrical engineer Erwin Hochmair, and with other outstanding partners, such as basic researchers, surgeons, clinicians, coworkers at MED-EL and, ultimately, the end-users of the devices," said Dr. Hochmair.

Together with Prof. Erwin Hochmair, Ingeborg Hochmair founded MED-EL with a vision that would ultimately bring cutting-edge applications to life in more than 100 countries. The company is privately held, and Ingeborg Hochmair remains at the helm. Being CEO of MED-EL is not simply a job for Dr. Hochmair; it is her life. Helping people overcome hearing loss as a barrier to communication was a founding principle of MED-EL and remains her mission and her passion. Improving the quality of life of patients continues to be a personal and professional core value that is lived every day through her leadership at MED-EL.

Dr. Hochmair and the entire MED-EL family extend congratulations to her fellow Research Award recipients, Graeme M. Clark and Blake S. Wilson.

"I am extremely gratified that our life's work is being recognized in such a prestigious manner," said Dr. Hochmair.

"However, I am even more pleased that this award will raise awareness for the entire field of cochlear implants and its importance as a treatment for small children born with severe-to-profound hearing loss, up to and including older adults who lose their hearing later in life. In so many ways, our work has just begun. Technological advances have accelerated our research at an unbelievable rate. We are on the threshold of breakthroughs that would have been considered dreams not long ago. After so many years, hearing restoration continues to be a miraculous field, and I still feel a sense of urgency to help improve the quality of life of deaf people. I am honored to have been a part of the development of this life-changing innovation, and look forward to continuing our strong tradition of advancing our technological and scientific foundation in the field of hearing implants for many years to come," she continued.

For more information about the Lasker Awards, visit www.laskerfoundation.org.

About MED-EL

MED-EL Medical Electronics is a leading provider of hearing implant systems worldwide. The company was founded by Austrian scientists and industry pioneers Ingeborg and Erwin Hochmair, who together developed the world's first microelectronic, multichannel cochlear implant in 1977. In 1990, they laid the foundation for the successful growth of the company when they hired their first employees. To date, the privately held company now has more than 1,500 employees around the world.

The cochlear implant was and remains the first replacement of a human sense, the sense of hearing. Today, MED-EL offers the widest range of implantable solutions worldwide to treat the various degrees of hearing

loss, including cochlear, middle ear and bone conduction implant systems as well as a system for combined electric and acoustic stimulation.

MED-EL's mission is to overcome hearing loss as a barrier to communication and quality of life. Individuals in approximately 100 countries enjoy the gift of hearing with a MED-EL Hearing Implant System. www.medel.com

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