

UCLA Confers Mani Bhaumik Award to Harvard medical school physician

Herbert Benson, a pioneer in mind/body medicine

The Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology at UCLA has named Harvard University's Dr. Herbert Benson as this year's recipient of the Mani Bhaumik Award. The award has been established to support investigators in the international community who advance the understanding of the brain and the conscious mind in healing through visionary research, books, and education.

Benson, the director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute (BHI) for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, and an associate professor of medicine at the Harvard Medical School, will receive his award in a ceremony at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 18, in the Auditorium of the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior on the UCLA campus. His keynote lecture is titled, "The Relaxation Response: Its Alteration of Gene Expression and how it Counteracts the Harmful Effects of Stress." Benson's talk will be followed by a question-and-answer session and a reception. The event is free and open to the public. Parking on campus is \$9.00 in Lot 9.

A graduate of Wesleyan University and the Harvard Medical School, Benson is the author or co-author of more than 180 scientific publications and 11 books. A pioneer in mind/body medicine, he is one of the first Western physicians to bring the effect of conscious mind on healing into medicine. In his 35-plus year career, he defined one of the tenets of mind/body medicine, the relaxation response, which leads to a state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional responses to stress (e.g., decreases in heart rate, blood pressure, rate of breathing, muscle tension, and an overall feeling of well being). He continues to lead teaching and research into the techniques and efficacy of the relaxation response in counteracting the numerous harmful effects of stress.

Benson and his colleagues have shown that a mind-body approach--one that couples the relaxation response with nutrition, exercise and cognitive therapies--is a useful tool for helping to treat such conditions as chronic pain, infertility, premenstrual syndrome, and insomnia. They also have found that it can alleviate symptoms associated with cancer and AIDS.

"Dr. Benson is truly one of the seminal thinkers in bringing the integrated study of the mind and body to Western medicine," said Mani Bhaumik. "Even though, as a cardiologist, he was trained in the Western ethos of medicine, he persevered in successfully developing his relaxation response at a time when such practices of alternative medicine were frowned upon in the West."

"I am deeply honored to receive the Mani Bhaumik award," said Benson. "It has special meaning to me because of my personal friendship with Norman Cousins. Norman and I often sought each other's advice on how best to ensure the success of psychoneuroimmunology and mind body medicine for the future. He would be delighted with tonight's event."

Bhaumik, co-inventor of the laser technology that made LASIK surgery possible, has funded the annual \$15,000 award. His interest in psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) — the investigation of the interactions between the brain and the immune system — springs from the pioneering work of Norman Cousins. Cousins came to UCLA in 1978 as an adjunct professor of medical humanities to harness the energies of top scientists dedicated to the emerging field of PNI. He was particularly interested in the impact of positive emotions and attitudes, such as purpose determination, love, hope, faith, will to live and festivity. His efforts resulted in the creation of the UCLA Program in Psychoneuroimmunology, which now carries his name. Cousins died in 1990.

"It is an honor for me to be associated with the Cousins Center, as I was privileged to know Norman Cousins, whose insights continue to inspire me. With this award, my goal is to educate

the public on the important benefits of the research and understanding of psychoneuroimmunology," said Bhaumik.

Bhaumik earned a Ph.D. in physics from the Indian Institute of Technology and a Sloan Foundation Fellowship for postdoctoral work at UCLA. For his valuable contributions to laser technology, he was elected by his scientific peers as a fellow of the American Physical Society and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Bhaumik received the Mahatma Gandhi Humanitarian Award from the Indian American Heritage Foundation for his outstanding contributions to science and humanity and for his international bestselling book, "Code Name God." He is also the creator and one of the executive producers of the new animated series, "Cosmic Quantum Ray," which has been distributed worldwide for broadcast in 2009. The series is geared towards inspiring children's interest in science. Most recently, Bhaumik was named the Patron of the International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) and his just published primer on cosmology, "The Cosmic Detective" (Penguin) has been chosen as an official book of IYA2009.

The Cousins Center encompasses an interdisciplinary network of scientists working to advance the understanding of psychoneuroimmunology by linking basic and clinical research programs and by translating findings into clinical practice. Led by Dr. Michael Irwin, the center is affiliated with the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior and the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, directed by Dr. Peter Whybrow.