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Contact: Sarah Marshall, Office of
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Email: sarah.marshall@usuhs.edu

USU Researcher Earns Top Honors for Contributions to Military Health System

Bethesda, Md. – The Uniformed Services University’s (USU) Dr. Thomas Davis, professor and vice chair of Research in the Department of Surgery, was bestowed the Military Health System Research Symposium’s (MHSRS) Distinguished Service Award during a ceremony Aug. 14, recognizing his significant contributions to research, focused specifically on the unique medical needs of the warfighter.

MHSRS is the Department of Defense’s foremost scientific meeting and takes place annually in Orlando. The conference provides a collaborative setting for thousands of scientists and academic researchers to present new knowledge of military-specific research, and also recognizes the most notable accomplishments by military and civilian researchers through a number of awards, including the MHSRS Distinguished Service Award. This award highlights substantial contributions to advance the growth of MHS research, as well as outstanding leadership and service to the nation.

“I’m deeply honored to receive this award. More importantly, I did not achieve this on my own,” Davis said. “There’s a wealth of people who have helped me along the way throughout my career. It is because of their collaborations, their mentorship, and their friendships, that I consider this a multifaceted award.”

Davis has dedicated more than 42 years to the field of immune modulation, immunotherapy, radiation injury, stem cell research, experimental hematology, wound healing, and transplantation biology. He has focused a bulk of his career on understanding how the body biologically responds to severe combat-related injuries.

Davis began his federal service as a full-time undergraduate research fellow at the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute (AFRRI) in 1981, which is now under USU but was then under the Department of Energy. He then became a research hematologist at the Naval Medical Research Institute (NMRI). In 1995, he was recruited as an adjunct assistant professor of Medicine at USU, and later concurrently served as the head of the Stem Cell Biology Branch at NMRI. After a brief stint as a researcher in the private medical industry, Davis returned to serve for nearly a decade as the Chief Senior Scientist, before becoming the Science Director for four years in the Naval Medical Research Center’s Regenerative Medicine Department. Davis later became Vice Chair for Research and the Scientific Director of the Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine lab in the USU/Walter Reed Department of Surgery.

A respected and valued research educator and mentor, Davis has also been the recipient or co-recipient of dozens of grants, including more than 15 competitive grants within the last five years alone. He has

published more than 130 peer-reviewed manuscripts and book chapters in high-impact journals on combat casualty-relevant topics, and holds five unique patents related to cell amplification, and immunotolerance. Among his many achievements throughout his career, Davis developed an immune-booster used on the battlefield, which received FDA approval. He also helped lay the foundation upon which USU's Surgical Critical Care Initiative (SC2i) was built, which has allowed for multiple ongoing, multi-center prospective clinical studies and trials. He has also made significant breakthroughs in understanding heterotopic ossification – a debilitating condition that tends to develop after severe local and systemic trauma, impacting about two-thirds of blast-injured combat casualties.

Dr. Benjamin “Kyle” Potter, chair of USU's Department of Surgery, noted Davis has made many profound contributions to the Military Health System, and has mentored more than a generation of clinician scientists coming up through the military ranks.

“He has really helped pave the way for the future of military medical research by furthering the career and advancing the intellectual capacity of people who are now clinician-scientists,” Potter said. “He has also moved the needle with regard to our understanding of combat wound health and combat-related heterotopic ossification.”

Dr. Eric Elster, Dean of USU's School of Medicine, shared similar sentiments.

“[Dr. Davis] has made significant contributions to understanding the immune response to injury, and understanding the science behind formation of heterotopic ossification, so that future wounded warriors don't have to deal with that dreaded complication. This is a critical issue for wounded warriors,” Elster said. “It's a privilege and honor to work with Dr. Davis, as a colleague, as a friend, as an investigator, and I look forward to doing more great work with him.”

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About the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences: The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, founded by an act of Congress in 1972, is the nation's federal health sciences university and the academic heart of the Military Health System. USU students are primarily active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who receive specialized education in tropical and infectious diseases, TBI and PTSD, disaster response and humanitarian assistance, global health, and acute trauma care. USU also has graduate programs in oral biology, biomedical sciences and public health committed to excellence in research. The University's research program covers a wide range of areas important to both the military and public health. For more information about USU and its programs, visit www.usuhs.edu.