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Neuroscientist to Discuss Use of Deadly Cone Snail Venom as Pain Drug at MBL Friday Evening Lecture, July 20

WOODS HOLE, MASS.— Beautiful but deadly cone snails use venom to capture prey, defend against predators, and deter competitors. The venoms of these marine snails, which can be found in warm seas and oceans around the world, contain many different toxins that vary in their effects—from no worse than a bee sting, to fatality in humans.

Dr. Baldomero M. Olivera, a Distinguished Professor of Biology at the University of Utah and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Professor will discuss the effects of cone snail venom in the nervous system and its pharmacological use as a pain drug at the July 20th Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) Friday Evening Lecture. The lecture titled, “Using Deadly Cone Snails to Understand Nervous Systems,” will begin at 8:00 PM in the MBL’s Lillie Auditorium, 7 MBL Street, Woods Hole. It is free and open to the public.

By studying the complex neurotoxic venom made by cone snails, Conus, Dr. Olivera and members of his lab have identified several drug candidates and gained a better understanding of how ion channels work. A synthetic form of a cone snail toxin discovered in Dr. Olivera’s lab is now used to treat pain effectively in patients who have become tolerant to morphine.

Dr. Olivera earned a B.S. in chemistry from the University of the Philippines, a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the California Institute of Technology, and did postdoctoral work at Stanford University. He returned to the Philippines to a faculty position in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of the Philippines, Medical School before moving to the University of Utah where he has been on the faculty since 1970. Dr. Olivera is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and American Philosophical Society, and American Association for the Advancement of Science. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the Utah Governor’s Medal for Science and Technology, the California Institute of Technology Distinguished Alumni Award, and the Harvard University Foundation Scientist of the Year.

The Friday Evening Lecture Series will continue throughout the summer at the MBL. The remaining lectures in the series are below. For more information, visit mbl.edu/FEL:

July 27, 2012
“Is Science Revolutionary? Thomas Kuhn and the Structure of Science”
Jed Z. Buchwald, California Institute of Technology and Paul Hoyningen-Huene, University of Hannover, Germany
August 3, 2012
Glassman Lecture
“Protein Folding in the Cell: The final Step of Information Transfer” – Arthur L. Horwich, Yale University, Howard Hughes Medical Institute

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August 10, 2012
Joshua Lederberg Lecture
“Food and Sex: The Neurogenetics of Innate Behavior”
Leslie B. Vosshall, The Rockefeller University; Howard Hughes Medical Institute

August 17, 2012
Sager Lecture
“How Bacteria Talk To Each Other”
Bonnie L. Bassler, Princeton University; Howard Hughes Medical Institute

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