

Medical prize honors discoverer of malarial drug

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(AP) -- A scientist who discovered a powerful malaria drug and two others who illuminated how proteins fold within cells have won prestigious medical awards.

The Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation announced the \$250,000 prizes Monday and will present them Sept. 23 in New York.

Tu Youyou, 81, of the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences in Beijing, won the clinical research award for discovering the [malaria drug](#) artemisinin (ar-tuh-MIHS'-ihn-ihn), which the foundation said has saved millions of lives.

In the late 1960s, as part of a Chinese government project, Tu began combing [ancient texts](#) and folk remedies to find a treatment for malaria. She collected 2,000 potential recipes, from which her team made 380 extracts. One extract, from sweet wormwood, showed promise in mouse studies. Following a clue from an ancient document, Tu redesigned the extraction process to make the extract more potent. In the early 1970s, she and her colleagues isolated the active ingredient, [artemisinin](#).

The Lasker award for basic research is shared by Dr. Franz-Ulrich Hartl, 54, of the [Max Planck](#) Institute of Biochemistry in Martinsried, Germany, and Dr. Arthur Horwich, 60, of Yale University. Their key discoveries about how proteins fold within cells may someday help scientists find new treatments for such illnesses as Alzheimer's, Huntington's and Lou Gehrig's diseases, the foundation said.

Before their work, scientists thought that proteins needed no help to fold into their proper shapes. But in the late 1980s, the two men discovered that the folding happens within a cage-like structure that promotes the process.

"They gave the medical world a key understanding of how proteins reach their biological potential," the foundation said.

A third Lasker prize, for public service, was awarded to the Clinical Center of the National Institutes of Health. Since 1953, the center has been "a model research hospital, providing innovative therapy and high-quality patient care, treating rare and severe diseases and producing outstanding physician-scientists," the foundation said.

The Lasker foundation was established in 1942. Albert Lasker was an advertising executive who died in 1952. His wife Mary was a longtime champion of medical research before her death in 1994.

More information: Lasker Foundation:
<http://www.laskerfoundation.org>

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