

Conti Receives Benedict Cassen Prize for Cancer Imaging Research

Peter S. Conti, MD, PhD, known for his pioneering work in the diagnosis and management of cancer, was awarded the Benedict Cassen Prize on July 13 during the 2020 SNMMI Annual Meeting. The honor is awarded every 2 years by the Education and Research Foundation (ERF) for Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging in recognition of outstanding achievement and work leading to a major advance in nuclear medicine science. Conti is a tenured professor at the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles, with academic appointments in the departments of radiology, biomedical engineering, and pharmaceutical sciences, and has been the director of the USC PET Imaging Science Center since its inception in 1991.

“The Cassen Prize Committee selected Peter Conti as the 2020 recipient in recognition of his pioneering work in the development of novel radiopharmaceuticals and clinical PET applications for cancer imaging, as well as his volunteerism and service to the molecular imaging community,” said ERF President Frances K. Keech, DHSc, RT(N).

During a special virtual plenary session at the SNMMI Annual Meeting, Conti presented the Cassen Lecture on “Imaging in 2020 and beyond: Expect the unexpected.” He offered insights into the potential role of molecular imaging of viral infection relevant to the current COVID-19 crisis, along with an overview spanning his more than 40 years in the cancer imaging field, from the early development of radiolabeled analogs of nucleosides and amino acids to more recent work using bifunctional chelation technologies, drug conjugates, and companion diagnostics, as well as multimodality imaging agents.

“It is an honor to be recognized by the Cassen Committee of the ERF and SNMMI,” Conti said. “It is a privilege to be considered a member of this elite group of scientists

who have contributed so much to the field. I want to thank all my U.S. and international collaborators, colleagues, mentors, students, friends, and family whose support and inspiration made this possible.”

Conti received his undergraduate degree from Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD) and his medical degree from Cornell University Medical College (New York, NY). His doctorate in biophysics was completed at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (New York, NY). He is board certified in both nuclear medicine and diagnostic radiology and is a fellow of both the American College of Radiology and the American College of Nuclear Medicine.

With more than 300 peer-reviewed articles published in the field of molecular imaging, Conti has focused on the development of novel PET and hybrid imaging agents for diagnostic and theranostic applications in cancer and other diseases. He was the 2016 recipient of the SNMMI Paul C. Aebersold Award for achievements in the basic science of nuclear medicine and the SNMMI 2018 Peter Valk Award for his pioneering work in clinical PET.

The Cassen Prize honors Benedict Cassen (1902–1972), whose invention of the rectilinear radioisotope scanner—the first instrument capable of making an image of radiotracer distribution in the organs of living patients—was seminal to the development of clinical nuclear medicine. Conti is the 15th individual since 1994 to receive the prestigious \$25,000 award from the ERF.



Peter S. Conti, MD, PhD