

Ruth Receives SNMMI Georg Charles de Hevesy Nuclear Pioneer Award

Thomas J. Ruth, PhD, a scientist known for his contributions to nuclear medicine and nuclear chemistry, was named as this year's recipient of the Georg Charles de Hevesy Nuclear Pioneer Award on June 13 as part of the SNMMI 2021 Annual Meeting. Ruth was recognized for his significant work in nuclear chemistry, specifically the identification and development of radioisotopes for PET imaging, which helped to advance acceptance for the technology. He also played a key role in development of cyclotron-based technology to produce the medical isotope ^{99m}Tc without the need for a nuclear reactor.

"Dr. Ruth has been a pioneer in radiopharmaceutical sciences for many years," said 2020–2021 SNMMI president Alan Packard, PhD. "He began his career as PET imaging was being introduced, and he has been a leader in the field ever since, as he investigated new radioisotopes, determined their optimal applications, and developed new ways to produce them. Many nuclear medicine scientists have benefited from Dr. Ruth's mentorship over the years, and he has left a legacy that has greatly benefited the field."

Ruth received his master's degree in nuclear chemistry in 1967 from the College of William and Mary (Williamsburg, VA), followed by a doctorate in nuclear spectroscopy in 1973 from Clark University (Worcester, MA). He began his career in 1976 at Brookhaven Laboratory (Upton, NY) and in 1980 moved to TRIUMF (Vancouver, Canada) as a research scientist. There he continued to serve in many roles, including as director of the University of British Columbia–TRIUMF PET Program, until his retirement in 2012. He currently serves as a senior emeritus research scientist at TRIUMF and the British Columbia Cancer Agency. Ruth is also an adjunct professor in the department of medicine at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) and in the department of physics and astronomy at the University of Victoria (Canada).

During his career at TRIUMF Ruth oversaw the installation of 4 PET scanners at the University of British Columbia Hospital, as well as installation of the TRIUMF-type 13-MeV (TR-13) cyclotron at TRIUMF. His career accomplishments helped secure investments to build TRIUMF's Institute for Advanced Medical Isotopes, a new facility that will house much of TRIUMF Life Sciences research in the years to come.



Thomas J. Ruth, PhD

"I am honored to receive SNMMI's Georg Charles de Hevesy Nuclear Medicine Pioneer Award," said Ruth. "I have had the pleasure to work with so many colleagues who encouraged me, challenged me, and worked with me throughout my career. My accomplishments would not have been possible without their support."

Since 1960, SNMMI has presented the Georg Charles de Hevesy Nuclear Medicine Pioneer Award annually to an individual for outstanding contributions to the field of nuclear medicine. De Hevesy received the 1943 Nobel Prize in chemistry for his work in determining the absorption, distribution, metabolism, and elimination of radioactive compounds in the human body. His work led to the foundation of nuclear medicine as a tool for diagnosis and therapy, and he is considered the father of nuclear medicine. The list of previous recipients of this award includes numerous Nobel laureates—such as Ernest Lawrence, PhD, who built the world's first cyclotron for the production of radionuclides, and Glenn Seaborg, PhD, who discovered more than half a dozen new elements.

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able to feel the joint satisfaction of adding to the scientific knowledge that has advanced our field. As I near the end of my career, I predict a great future for nuclear medicine as it takes fresh advantage of the revolutionary increases in the fundamental understanding of human biology—in cancer

biology, function of the brain, developmental biology, and immunology, as shining examples. These advances of basic biology must inevitably incite future inventions that will lead to improved diagnosis and therapy with radioisotopes—for the benefit of sick patients, rich and poor, throughout the world."