

## **Media Release - Friday 6 July 2001**

### **Genetic Hearing Loss - New Frontiers in Treatment**

Research being carried out by US-based Professor Bronya Keats is contributing to the development of gene-based therapies for genetically caused hearing loss. This could lead to enormous benefits to future generations. Sponsored by the Oticon Foundation in NZ, Australian-born Professor Keats will share her knowledge with audiologists and academics as she visits New Zealand this week.

Audiologist and Secretary to the Oticon Foundation, Karen Pullar says Professor Keats' gene research is particularly exciting. "Congenital hearing loss is caused by genetic reasons in 60% of cases. Identifying these genes will mean more accurate diagnosis, more effective management, and possibly, early intervention for children who have genetic hearing loss," said Ms Pullar.

Professor Keats will present the Oticon Foundation awards to the two top students from Auckland University's Master of Audiology degree, the country's only audiology programme on Monday 9 July. Established in 1990, the degree programme is supported by active research in hearing sciences and audiology. The two winners of the awards are Diem Mai, Mt Roskill, for her research on identification of the calcium activated channels in the cochlea and Michelle Nasser, Waikato, for her research on the protection of the cochlea from damage caused by lack of blood flow.

The Auckland function will be held on Monday 9 July 2001 from 6-7.30pm in the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Common Room, School of Medicine, University of Auckland, Park Road, Grafton, Auckland. (Please use main entrance.)

Professor Keats will also address the New Zealand Audiological Society conference *Future Directions in Audiology* in Christchurch from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> July 2001. Professor Keats is Head of the Department of Genetics and Director of the Molecular and Human Genetics Centre of Excellence, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Centre, New Orleans. She received her Ph.D. in human genetics from the Australian National University in 1976, and spent the next five years in the Population Genetics Laboratory at the University of Hawaii. She has immense experience in the field of human genetics, and has worked closely with Audiologists and Otologists in many investigations.

The Oticon Foundation established in 1976 as the charitable trust of Oticon New Zealand Ltd. The Oticon company, founded in Denmark, is one of the oldest hearing aid manufacturers in the world. The Oticon Foundation provides \$100,000 in funding each year to projects that help remedy hearing loss among people and improve the quality of life for hearing impaired individuals and their families.

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