

Professor Peter Malcolm Colman

The degree of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) was conferred upon Professor Peter Malcolm Colman at the ceremony held on 21 March 2000.

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present to you Peter Malcolm Colman, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.

Peter Malcolm Colman is a graduate of the University of Adelaide, from where he also obtained his doctorate in 1968. His thesis dealt with the determination of the structures of small molecules by X-ray diffraction. After three years as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oregon with Professor Brian Matthews, Colman took up another post-doctoral Research Fellowship, this time at the Max-Planck Institut in Munich. The research director was Professor Robert Huber (later a Nobel Laureate), who offered Colman a most challenging problem: the first crystal structure analysis of a complete antibody molecule. Colman's success in meeting that challenge firmly placed him in the ranks of the world's outstanding young protein crystallographers.

Colman returned to Australia in 1975 as a Queen Elizabeth II Fellow at the School of Chemistry of the University of Sydney, in Professor Hans Freeman's crystallography laboratory. It was in Sydney that Colman began - out of curiosity - the study of an enzyme, neuraminidase - research which would later have far-reaching effects.

In 1978, Colman was appointed to a research position at the CSIRO Division of Protein Chemistry at Parkville in Melbourne where he rose steadily through the ranks until he was Chief of the re-named CSIRO Division of Biomolecular Engineering, and later Director of the Biomolecular Research Institute, which is his current title.

At Parkville, Colman assembled a world-class group of researchers, and made the most crucial contribution - the structure analysis of neuraminidase, an enzyme that forms part of the surface of the influenza virus particle. The research led to the identification of a part of the neuraminidase molecule that might be vulnerable to attack by appropriate drugs. Subsequent computer-based design of drugs that might target the vulnerable part of the neuraminidase molecule resulted in 'Relenza', the world's first drug to be effective in the treatment of influenza in man, and now marketed widely by Glaxo-Wellcome.

Colman's work has been recognised by his election to Fellowship of the Australian Academy of Science and award of its Frederick White Prize and Burnet Medal, as well as the receipt in 1996 of the Australia Prize.

The story of Peter Malcolm Colman is the story of a well-trained Australian graduate who responded to the challenges of working in leading laboratories overseas, returned home with a sense of scientific mission and a deep social conscience, and then contributed both to the development of his science as a whole and to the development of Australia as a major centre for that science. It is also the story of research which was initiated purely as a matter of scientific interest - but which produced results of lasting benefit to the health of the human race and to the economy of Australia.

Chancellor, I present Peter Malcolm Colman for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science honoris causa and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.