

Professor John Watson Funder AO

BA MB BS PhD Melb Hon LLD Monash, FRACP FRCP – eminent endocrine researcher, Professor of Medicine at Monash University and Senior Fellow at Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research, Monash Medical Centre

Honorary Doctor of Medicine

Conferring ceremony: 9.30am 9 May 2014 (Medicine).

Citation

Pro-Chancellor I have the honour to present Professor John Watson Funder, officer of the Order of Australia, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine, *honoris causa*.

This award recognises his exceptional and sustained achievement as a scholar and leader in medical science over more than four decades. As a superlative researcher, mentor, physician-scientist and educator, John Funder is this country's doyen of Endocrinology, a discipline in which Australia has long been a world leader. Globally, in this discipline he is the best known Australian and a universally admired figure held in awe, admiration and affection.

Born in Adelaide and educated at the University of Melbourne, he took a BA (1964) followed by M.B.B.S with honours in 1965 his M.D and PhD degrees, in 1971, and has been a career medical researcher since graduation. Historically, his timing was impeccable. He was in the first generation of modern endocrinologists exposed to the Nobel Prize-winning invention of radioimmunoassay in 1960. This methodology allowed measurement with undreamt of sensitivity and precision of minute quantities of virtually any substance of biological interest. With flair and distinction, Funder adapted this technology to solve problems in the body's control of salt, blood pressure and cardiovascular physiology and disease, always with an eye on not only fundamental scientific discovery but also practical therapeutics.

He has been a remarkably effective and influential scientist. Through more than 550 scientific papers, featuring distinctively high citation rates, he has become the world's foremost authority on aldosterone, the salt-retaining adrenal hormone, and its receptor. Through governing the body's handling of salt and blood pressure, aldosterone and its receptor in the brain, kidneys and elsewhere are vital determinants of cardiovascular health and disease, with pivotal roles in hypertension and heart failure.

Funder's most important scientific contribution is his discovery of how the two classes of adrenal steroid hormones interact to coordinate the regulation of stress, blood pressure and cardiac function. His 1988 Science paper, a major discovery in steroid hormone action, has been highly influential in identifying new treatments for heart failure and hypertension. Funder's abiding commitment, and unmatched distinction as a working scientist, is well illustrated by his 2011 solo author papers in Science, a decade after his formal retirement, and another in *Cell*, late last year. Few medical scientists have shown such sustained magisterial authority in a dynamic field of medical research. He has remained a beacon of knowledge and the most eloquent and lucid interpreter of the cavalcade of sometimes confusing findings. No major international meeting in endocrine or cardiovascular biology would be complete without his involvement, and he is almost invariably a keynote speaker or organiser. As a consequence his advice is highly sought by academic peers as well as many pharmaceutical companies engaged in this field. The results of this research have direct consequences for the care of millions of patients worldwide.

John Funder has also been a mentor to dozens of individuals who have gone on to leading positions in endocrinology both nationally and internationally. His PhD students have populated Australia's major medical research institutes and benefitted from his guidance. Personally he has been a great friend and supporter of numerous scientists in the clinic and the lab, especially by fostering contacts through his network of international scientific friends and collaborators. As a medical research administrator, Funder headed the Baker Research Institute through its formative decade of the 1990s which launched it on a growth path from a small, effective organisation to one of the two top medical research institutes in Australia.

He has served as President of the Australian Society for Medical Research (1979) and the Endocrine Society of Australia (1982-84), as well as Chairman (1996-2000) and President (2004-8) of the International Society for Endocrinology. He has also been awarded numerous prizes and awards from scientific societies and organisations as well as honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians (UK) an Honorary Doctor of Laws, Monash University (2010), and an Honorary Doctor of Medical Science, University of Melbourne (2013).

Pro-Chancellor, I present John Watson Funder for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine, *honoris causa*, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.