Leading society for ultrasound in obstetrics and gynecology announces latest winner of prestigious award

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The International Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology (ISUOG) honours Prof. Kurt Hecher for his outstanding scientific contribution to the advancement of ultrasound in obstetrics and gynecology.

Every year, ISUOG presents its highest award, the Ian Donald Gold Medal. It is given to one prominent researcher for their exceptional work within the field of obstetric and gynecological imaging.

This year, it has been awarded to Prof. Hecher for his significant role in the advancement of diagnostic ultrasound in obstetrics and fetal medicine which has helped to improve the outcomes for high-risk pregnancies.

With over 45 years of experience and an impressive 286 scientific publications, Prof. Hecher is recognised as a leading expert in ultrasound in obstetrics and gynecology. He currently works at the Department of Obstetrics and Prenatal Medicine at the University Medical Centre Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf in Hamburg, Germany, where he gained his professorship in 2003. Beyond medicine, Prof. Hecher has a passion for Asian cultures. His interests have led him to study Sanskrit and Indian culture and mountaineer through the Himalayas.

Prof. Hecher's research career kickstarted after achieving a doctorate in medicine from the University of Graz, Austria. He has worked in various prestigious institutions, such as the Harris Birthright Research Centre for Fetal Medicine at King's College in London. During Prof. Hecher's time at King's, he became fascinated by the emerging Doppler technique. After witnessing the first fetoscopic laser surgery for twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome (TTTS), Prof. Hecher introduced this technique in Germany, where his centre in Hamburg generates important research and is a major referral and training hub for many countries.

Over the course of his career, Prof. Hecher has participated in several landmark research projects, such as Eurofoetus. He has played a leading role in comparing Doppler and cardiotocography in early-onset fetal growth restriction (FGR), which laid the foundation for the TRUFFLE study. Prof. Hecher was a key contributor to the development of the WHO fetal growth charts. Due to his internationally renowned expertise, Prof. Hecher has been involved in the development of recommendations and guidelines of various professional societies, stretching beyond ISUOG, on the management of twin pregnancies, fetal growth restriction and fetal heart examination.

Within ISUOG, Prof. Hecher also gained a high reputation through his work as President (2006-2008). He has served as an editor of their journal Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology (UOG) since 2003, and was the Chair of the 19th and 29th ISUOG World Congresses, in 2009 and 2019, in Hamburg and Berlin respectively.

Prof. Hecher said: "I feel extremely honoured, and I am very happy to have been nominated by my peers, and colleagues of the Ian Donald Gold Medal Sub-Committee, for the most prestigious award bestowed by ISUOG. It is the crowning highlight of my research career which is continuing in its fourth decade.

"I am well aware that my research, in monitoring fetal cardiovascular circulation by Doppler ultrasound, has only been made possible by, and is founded on, work previously conducted by other researchers and my teachers. Furthermore, nowadays innovations are always a result of teamwork and need exchange of ideas and cooperation with other research groups, to whom I am extremely grateful. This is a favourable moment to become aware of the great luck I have had - to be able to contribute to the advancement of diagnostic ultrasound in obstetrics and fetal medicine. I hope that this will continue to help improve the outcomes of high-risk pregnancies with fetal growth restriction or monochorionic twins, for both mothers and fetuses. Giving babies a better start in life is the ultimate goal of all research in our field."

At this year's ISUOG World Congress in Cancun, Mexico, Prof. Hecher will deliver the Ian Donald Gold Medal lecture, on the first day of the society's flagship annual event. Alongside this, the December issue of ISUOG's journal, UOG, will feature an article on his career and life achievements that led him to be

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honoured with the award.

Prof. Katia Bilardo, who will present Prof. Hecher with his award said: “Prof. Hecher has made significant contributions to the advancement of science in the field of obstetrics. Through his numerous publications and lectures, he has played a vital role in improving women's health. His pioneering work on the value of ductus venosus Doppler investigation in the management of early and severe fetal growth restriction has had a profound impact on clinical practice. His major contributions to the development of fetal surgery for TTTS, as well as its long-term outcomes, further emphasise his influence in the field. Prof. Hecher has been engaged with ISUOG ever since its inception and he is known for his honesty and sincerity.”

Prof. Ulrich Gembruch, another Ian Donald Gold medallist, said: “Kurt Hecher can look back on more than 30 years of experience in academic maternofetal medicine. He has been a pioneer in many areas of fetal medicine.”

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Notes to editors:

ISUOG is a charitable organisation and the leading international society of experts in ultrasound for obstetrics and gynecology. Beginning in 1991 with the first issue UOG Journal and the first World Congress, ISUOG has grown delivering education to members in 140 countries. ISUOG’s long-term vision is that every woman in the world has access to ultrasound, that every scan provider is competent, and that the diagnosis of obstetric and gynecologic conditions is effective so that women’s health outcomes improve.

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