

U of T dean of pharmacy wins \$250,000 Dr. Rogers Prize

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Heather Boon is the 2015 recipient of the \$250,000 Dr. Rogers Prize. She is a professor of pharmacy at the University of Toronto.

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University of Toronto pharmacy professor Heather Boon is the 2015 winner of the \$250,000 [Dr. Rogers Prize](#), awarded Friday night in Vancouver for her contribution to complementary and alternative medicine.

“It’s a bit overwhelming to be quite honest,” Boon said about winning the award. “It’s amazing, it’s exciting, it feels good to have someone recognize all the hard work and time and energy, and blood, sweat and tears you’ve put into your life’s work. So it’s really, really exciting.”

The prize is named for the late Dr. Roger Hayward Rogers, who pioneered alternative treatments for cancer patients in B.C.

Starting from the premise that about three-quarters of Canadians have tried alternative medical treatments

despite a lack of academic research, Boon has written a textbook on natural health products along with more than 150 academic publications on their safety and efficacy. She is now dean of U of T's Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy.

Her latest research examines how recent changes in Ontario's regulations on complementary medicine have changed clinical practice and patient access. Boon is also leading a controversial study on the effects of homeopathic treatments on children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, ADHD. The study drew criticism earlier this year from 90 scientists who wrote an open letter to her saying it legitimized pseudo-science.

Previous research in Canada indicates that consumers spend billions of dollars each year on providers of alternative therapy — most commonly chiropractors, massage therapists, acupuncturists, energy healers and naturopathic doctors — and billions more on herbs, supplements, vitamins, diet programs, books, classes and equipment.

Boon rejected the criticism in the open letter. "As I said then, and I keep repeating, this study was really done at the request of patients who believed that they had experience and benefits.

"I don't think the criticism was warranted. I think that we have a phenomena, people claiming they're getting better, and so like any scientist I'm curious about what's going on."

Boon helped to develop the Centre for Integrative Medicine, a joint venture between the University of Toronto and Scarborough Hospital. She has been the co-director of Canada's research network on complementary and alternative medicine, IN-CAM, since 2004 and president of the International Society for Complementary Medicine Research from 2013 to 2015.

Founded in 2007, the Dr. Rogers Prize is awarded every two years and is funded by Vancouver's Lotte and John Hecht Memorial Foundation.

PREVIOUS RECIPIENTS

2013 — Dr. Sunita Vohra, founding director of CARE (Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research and Education) at Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton.

2011 — Dr. Marja Verhoef, Canada's only Research Chair in Complementary Medicine at the University of Calgary.

2009 — Dr. Hal Gunn, co-founder with Rogers of Vancouver's Centre for Integrated Therapy, now known as InspireHealth.

2009 — Dr. Badri (Bud) Rickhi, founder of what is now the Canadian Institute for Natural and Integrative Medicine (CINIM).

2007 — Dr. Abram Hoffer, a leading researcher in orthomolecular medicine based on the concept that optimizing vitamin and mineral balances in the body improves health.

2007 — Dr. Alastair Cunningham, who studied the effects of mental therapies to complement mainstream

medical treatment for chronic disease.

With a file by Brian Morton, Vancouver Sun