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New York scientist wins Lasker Foundation award

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The New York scientist who discovered key components of the human immune system, and the developers of artificial heart valves, are recipients of awards often called the U.S. equivalent to the Nobel Prize. Announced today by the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation in Manhattan, recipients of the nonprofit's awards for basic medical and clinical research include scientists who have made major contributions to medical investigation. The foundation also announced the winner of its bi-annual public service award. Dr. Ralph Steinman, 64, of Rockefeller University in Manhattan, won for basic medical research. Steinman unmasked the body's dendritic cells, security guards of the immune system that patrol the blood in search of microbial invaders.

His discovery was made over the course of many years while studying other immune system cells that are close cousins. Dendritic cells, he found, cruise constantly and are known to bind to - and ferry out of the body - invaders such as HIV. The award for clinical research honors two recipients: Dr. Alain Carpentier, 74, of Hospital Europeen Georges Pompidou in Paris, who developed an artificial mitral

valve for heart patients, and Albert Starr, 81, of the Providence Health System in Portland, Ore., who developed a prosthetic aortic valve. The awards are named for Albert Lasker, a onetime titan of American advertising. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in Bethesda, Md., receives a public service award named for Mary Lasker, who was recognized for contributions leading to the growth of the National Institutes of Health. Fauci is honored for marshaling the nation's scientific response to two key global crises: the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the threat of bioterror. A native of Brooklyn, Fauci is widely credited with urging President George W. Bush to create the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the \$15-billion effort to combat AIDS in Africa and other underdeveloped regions. Fauci is also the architect of Project Bioshield, the primary public health blueprint on bioterrorism. Each Lasker award winner receives an honorarium of \$150,000. The award has been nicknamed the American Nobel because 72 of its recipients have gone in to win the Nobel.