Two Texas Tech Nutritional Sciences Professors Receive National Awards

Naima Moustaid-Moussa and Nikhil Dhurandhar research different facets of obesity.

Two professors from Texas Tech University’s Department of Nutritional Sciences received prestigious national awards from the American Society for Nutrition (ASN).

Dr. Nikhil Dhurandhar, the newly hired department chairman and president of The Obesity Society, will accept the 2015 Osborne and Mendel Award, while Naima Moustaid-Moussa, the director of the Obesity Research Cluster, will accept the 2015 Pfizer Consumer Healthcare Nutritional Sciences Award. Both will be honored at ASN’s award ceremony March 29 in Boston during the annual Experimental Biology meeting.

“We are extremely proud of Dr. Dhurandhar and Dr. Moustaid-Moussa and their accomplishments,” said Linda Hoover, dean of the College of Human Sciences. “Their contributions to the field of nutrition are significant, particularly in the area of obesity research. These awards from the American Society for Nutrition not only highlight the work of these two faculty members but also brings attention to our newly formed Department of Nutritional Sciences. Both Dr. Dhurandhar and Dr. Moustaid-Moussa have been instrumental in the creation of the department and will continue to contribute to its success.”

The Osborne and Mendel Award recognizes recent outstanding basic research accomplishments in nutrition. Dhurandhar, who came to Texas Tech in November from The Pennington Biomedical Research Center at Louisiana State University, is researching an obesity-causing virus and the potential both for diabetes treatment and a vaccine for obesity.

“I am honored to receive this important award from the American Society for Nutrition, a highly prominent professional organization,” Dhurandhar said. “This recognition of our research is highly encouraging. It is well worth the efforts our team has endured in conducting this pioneering research about the role of certain infections in obesity and diabetes. I hope our research will eventually contribute to alleviating sufferings of people affected with obesity or diabetes.”

The Pfizer award recognizes significant investigative contributions to the understanding of human nutrition. Prior to coming to Texas Tech in 2012, Moustaid-Moussa was co-director of the Obesity Research Center at the University of Tennessee. Her research focuses on nutrient-gene interactions in health and disease, with specific emphasis on the role of fat cell inflammation in obesity and associated diseases.

“I am thrilled and honored to be selected for this award by the American Society for Nutrition,” Moustaid-Moussa said. “I do not consider this at all as a personal award. This award would not have been possible without a team effort and hard work and dedication of my lab students, postdocs and research staff.”

Such recognition moves Texas Tech along the path to Tier 1 research status, leaders said.

“Texas Tech is committed to groundbreaking research that improves quality of life for people, and nowhere is that more clear than in the work being done to combat obesity,” Texas Tech President M. Duane Nellis said. “Congratulations to Dr. Dhurandhar and Dr. Moustaid-Moussa for this recognition. These awards demonstrate the strength of the faculty we have in the College of Human Sciences and at Texas Tech.”

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