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ALBERT AND MARY LASKER FOUNDATION ELECTS BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH PIONEERS MARY-CLAIRE KING AND KATALIN KARIKÓ TO ITS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(New York, July 2, 2024)— The Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation today announced the election of Lasker Laureates and biomedical research pioneers, Mary-Claire King, Ph.D., and Katalin Karikó, Ph.D., to the organization's Board of Directors. Dr. King, a geneticist, is widely known for her discoveries implicating the gene BRCA1 in breast and ovarian cancers; Dr. Karikó, a biochemist, received worldwide recognition for her work enabling the development of mRNA vaccines, especially vaccines to combat COVID-19.

"We are incredibly pleased to welcome two legendary scientists and champions of biomedical research to the Lasker Foundation Board," said Lasker Board Chair Betsy Nabel, M.D. "Both have made remarkable discoveries and life-saving contributions to humanity. They are model advocates for accelerating pathways in medical research – a commitment which sits at the core of the Lasker Foundation mission."

"We welcome these two visionary and heroic scientists to the Lasker Board," said Claire Pomeroy, M.D., M.B.A., President and CEO of the Lasker Foundation. "As researchers, they have made bold discoveries that inspire us, and as advocates, they communicate the power of science to advance knowledge and improve human health. The Lasker Foundation looks forward to the benefit of their contributions."

Mary-Claire King, Ph.D., is a trailblazing American geneticist renowned for her groundbreaking contributions to medical genetics and human rights advocacy. She was awarded the *Lasker~Koshland Special Achievement Award* in 2014 for the discovery of *BRCA1* as a gene responsible for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer, a revolutionary finding that ultimately led to its effective treatment. In addition to breast and ovarian cancer, her research includes investigation of the genetic bases of schizophrenia, and rare genetic disorders in children.

Beyond her innovative cancer research, she is celebrated for her humanitarian efforts, developing and applying familial DNA sequence matching for investigations of human rights abuses worldwide. Early in her career, in the early 1970s, she advanced our understanding of human evolution with the profound biological discovery that humans and chimpanzees share 99% of their gene sequences.

Among her many awards, she has received the Canada Gairdner International Award (2021), the Dan David Prize (Israel, 2018), the Shaw Prize for Life Science and Medicine (Hong Kong, 2018), the Gruber Genetics Prize (2004), and the United States National Medal of Science (2016). She is a member of the US National Academy of Sciences (elected 2005) and the National Academy of Medicine (elected 1994).

Since 1995, Dr. King has been the American Cancer Society Professor of Medical Genetics and of Genome Sciences at the University of Washington. She received her BA *cum laude* in Mathematics from Carleton College in Minnesota (1966), and her Ph.D. in Genetics from the University of California at Berkeley (1973). She did her postdoctoral training at UC San Francisco (1974-1976), and later served as professor at UC Berkeley from 1976-1995.

Katalin Karikó, Ph.D. is a pioneering biochemist and researcher, best known for her revolutionary discoveries in the fields of RNA biochemistry, vaccines and therapeutics, including her cutting-edge contributions to mRNA technology and the COVID-19 vaccines. She and Drew Weissman, M.D., Ph.D., were recipients of the *Lasker~Debakey Award for Clinical Medical Research* in 2022 and went on to win the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2023, for their discoveries in mRNA technology used in vaccines to prevent COVID-19. She continues her work on the mRNA technology and to develop therapeutics for neurodegenerative diseases.

More than 15 years ago at Penn Medicine, Karikó and Weissman found a way to modify mRNA and later developed a delivery technique to package the mRNA in lipid nanoparticles. This made it possible for mRNA to reach the proper part of the body and trigger an immune response to fight disease, leading to the global breakthrough of mRNA vaccines that were safe, effective, and practical to fight COVID.

Karikó has received numerous awards and accolades, including the Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences (2022), Canada Gairdner International Award (2022), Tang Prize (2022), National Inventors Hall of Fame (2023), and the Albany Medical Center Prize (2021).

Karikó is currently a professor at the University of Szeged, Hungary and an adjunct professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Pennsylvania, which she first joined in 1989. She was senior vice president at BioNTech for a decade up until 2022. Karikó received her bachelor's degree in biology (1978) and her doctorate in biochemistry (1982) from the University of Szeged. Before immigrating to the United States from Hungary in 1985, she worked at the Biological Research Center of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Szeged.

About the Lasker Foundation: Established in 1942 by Albert and Mary Lasker, The Lasker Foundation seeks to increase support for biomedical research by celebrating the power of biomedical science to save and improve human lives. Through its internationally renowned Lasker Awards, educational initiatives, and public advocacy, the Foundation recognizes the most important achievements in science and public service, supports and encourages the scientific leaders of tomorrow, and raises awareness of the ever-present need for research funding. The Foundation is committed to inspiring robust and sustained support for biomedical research, fueled by Mary Lasker's call to action: "If you think research is expensive, try disease!" More information at laskerfoundation.org.

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