

Press release: [European College of Neuropsychopharmacology](#) (ECNP)

5 May 2020 – for immediate release

[ECNP Neuropsychopharmacology Award goes to Markus Heilig for work on the understanding of addiction and other stress-related disorders](#)

The European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP) is pleased to announce Markus Heilig as the recipient of the 2020 ECNP Neuropsychopharmacology Award in recognition of his outstanding achievements in advancing knowledge of the pharmacology and pharmacogenetics of addictive disorders and other stress-related conditions. The ECNP Neuropsychopharmacology Award is presented annually and recognises distinguished research in applied and translational neuroscience.

Markus Heilig is professor of psychiatry and director of the Center for Social and Affective Neuroscience at Linköping University in Sweden. Before returning to Sweden in 2015 to be the Center's founding director, he served for more than ten years at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States, where he established and led a major NIH intramural programme in translational research.

Combining basic research on the neurobiology of stress-related disorders such as addiction and anxiety with human mechanistic and interventional studies, he has been a pioneer in connecting the brain processes and long-term neuroadaptations involved in addiction with the discovery of novel mechanisms that can be targeted for pharmacotherapies. Such innovative strategies, anchored in Heilig's concurrent work as an active clinician and medical director, use endophenotype/biomarker-based approaches that cut across diagnostic categories, and have proven exceptionally productive.

His recent expansion of research scope from a focus on stress-mediated mechanisms to a wider appraisal of the critical role of choices between drug- and natural rewards and social factors in addiction and other psychiatric disorders has been a model of interdisciplinary neuroscience. His studies have integrated the analysis of gene expression and its epigenetic programming with behavioural pharmacology in rodent models and human experimental medicine, using behavioural, neuroendocrine, psychophysiological and functional brain imaging-based methods to elucidate the underlying neural substrates. Such an expansive view of social stressors and the role of pro-inflammatory signalling in the mediation of negative emotional consequences of stress promises to have important implications for our understanding of psychiatric conditions characterised by progressive social marginalisation.

Heilig's research has generated close to 300 peer-reviewed journal articles and three books, including two popular science books, and a total of more than 20,000 citations. In addition to his scientific contributions, he is a passionate advocate for the right of patients with psychiatric and addictive disorders to receive treatment that respects their autonomy and is based on the highest-quality evidence. He is a member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, and a scientific advisor to the Swedish Medical Products Agency and the Board of Health and Welfare.

In announcing the award, ECNP Award Committee chair Andreas Meyer-Lindenberg (Mannheim, Germany), said, *"Markus Heilig has shown an exceptional career-long commitment to translational neuroscience at the highest levels. His achievement spans the breadth of research from fundamental models in animals to practice in the clinic. The result is a remarkable body of work that has made ground-breaking contributions to our understanding of stress-related conditions and how*

they can be treated. He is an outstanding choice the 2020 Neuropsychopharmacology Award in clinical research."

Markus Heilig will deliver the ECNP Neuropsychopharmacology Award plenary lecture during the 33rd ECNP Congress on 12-15 September 2020.

The ECNP Neuropsychopharmacology Award recognises innovative and distinguished research achievements in applied and translational neuroscience. The award is granted each year, alternating between basic science and clinical research. The award is accompanied by a prize of €10,000, which the winner may share with junior collaborators.

###

ECNP is an independent scientific association whose mission is to advance the science of the brain, promote better treatment and enhance brain health. The annual ECNP Congress attracts some 5,500 scientists and clinicians from across the world to discuss the latest advances in brain research in Europe's largest meeting on brain science. More information about ECNP, its aims and activities, can be found at www.ecnp.eu.

More information on the ECNP Neuropsychopharmacology Award can be found at: www.ecnp.eu/ena-award.

Contact:

Tom Parkhill
ECNP Press Officer
Tel. +39 349 238 8191 (mobile)
E-mail: tom@parkhill.it