Axel Munthe Award 1996—Professor Luigi Mastroianni Jr

The Axel Munthe Award was instigated in 1978, at a meeting between Drs Maxwell Roland, Pierre Soupart, Asbjorn Aakvang, Rune Eliasson, Armando F.Mendizabal, Andrew V.Schally and Vincenzo Abate in Naples. It was intended to honour scientists and clinicians who were investigating novel areas of animal and human reproduction. A decision was made to award the prize at intervals of 3 or 4 years. Initially, prizes were awarded to three or four candidates on each occasion since so many potential winners were available. It was then reduced to a single winner, selected from several nominated candidates.

The Award has lived up to the intention of its founders. Its name was chosen to link the prize with the name and outlook of the highly respected Swedish clinician, writer and philosopher Axel Munthe, who built a home on Capri in the 19th Century. Links were made with the Swedish Royal Family Academy and with successive Italian Ministers of Health. Some of the ceremonies were held in the small church in the garden of Axel Munthe’s house in Annacapri.

A second award was added in 1985, to honour men and women who had contributed to the public dissemination of information on reproduction. It was entitled the P.C.Steptoe Award. Several distinguished winners have been granted this honour at ceremonies on the Isle of Capri or in Naples to confer each of these awards on the selected recipients. The first one was awarded to L.Nilsson in 1985 and last year the prize went to F.Prattico.

In 1996, Professor Luigi Mastroianni Jr was awarded the Axel Munthe Award. The choice of the winner was based on an extensive and detailed method of selection. A small Nomination Committee submitted names of candidates, and great care was taken to ensure that the choice was not made on a personal or national basis. The Selection Committee then chose the winner by a modified system of qualified majority voting. Two rounds of voting were needed to select the winner, the second round being reduced to three clear leaders from an original field of 12. The award ceremonies were held in Naples on October 27, 1996, under the auspices of Mr A.Rastrelli, President of the Regione Campania and Mr A.Mancini, President of the Italian Senate.

Professor Mastroianni received his MD from the Boston University School of Medicine in 1950. He specialized in obstetrics and gynaecology, and held an Internship and Residency in the Metropolitan University, New York between 1950 and 1954. After a series of appointments as Research Fellow in Harvard University, and Instructor and Assistant Professor at Yale University, he became Professor in the University of California between 1961–1965 and since then has been

Figure 1. Professor Luigi Mastroianni Jr

Professor and Chairman of Obstetrics and Gynecology in the University of Pennsylvania. His major honours include 1970–1975, Chief Editor, Fertility and Sterility; 1974, Gregory Pincus Award; 1976–1977, President, American Fertility Society; 1980–1983, Board of Directors, International Society of Developmental Biology; 1988–1990, National Academy of Science and Academy of Medicine; 1989, King Feisal International Prize in Medicine, and Vice-President, American Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology; 1992, Distinguished Service Award, Society for the Study of Reproduction. His citation for the Axel Munthe Prize credited him with vision and integrity in clinical and basic research in reproductive science, characterized by a broad range of studies from the treatment of infertility to fertility control and contraception. His work and outlook was honoured as a symbol of the link between clinical and basic sciences and brought a deep sense of humanism to his field.

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