

Pollin Prize awarded to Basil Hetzel for his pioneering work on IDD

The 2009 Pollin Prize for Research in Pediatrics has been awarded to Basil S. Hetzel, M.D. for his discovery that maternal iodine deficiency can cause brain damage in newborns. It is estimated that Dr. Hetzel's work has protected nearly 80 million newborns from brain damage, and saved over one billion intelligence quotient points.

Basil S. Hetzel, M.D. was born in London in 1922 and was educated at King's College and St. Peter's College in Adelaide, Australia. After receiving his medical degree from the University of Adelaide, he pursued his postgraduate education and research in Adelaide (1945-51), New York (Fulbright Research Scholar 1951-54), and London (1954-55). He returned to the University of Adelaide to serve as Professor of Medicine (1956-68) and later spent seven years in the post of Foundation Professor of Social and Preventive Medicine at Monash University in Melbourne. In 1975, Dr. Hetzel joined the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) as their first Chief of the Division of Human Nutrition.

From 1964 to 1972, he, along with a team of researchers in Papua New Guinea, established that severe brain damage could be prevented by correcting iodine deficiencies before pregnancy. Subsequent studies in animal models



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confirmed the effect of severe maternal iodine deficiency on fetal brain development. Because of Dr. Hetzel's important research, the World Health Organization (WHO) now recognizes iodine deficiency as the most common preventable cause of brain damage in the world. Despite this understanding, it is believed

that each year nearly 41 million newborns from 130 countries are still at risk for brain damage caused by iodine deficiency. Dr. Hetzel has devoted his life to preventing needless brain damage in newborns. In 1985 he played a key role in establishing and then leading the ICCIDD, which has since grown into a multidisciplinary global network of 700 professionals from more than 100 countries. In 1995, he became Chairman of the ICCIDD and still serves as a senior advisor to the organization today.

In addition to his ground breaking work in iodine deficiency, Dr. Hetzel has published articles in more than 200 scientific publications and has worked as the author, editor, or co-editor of 18 books. His book, "The Story of Iodine Deficiency: A Challenge in International Nutrition" (1989) has been translated into French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian. Dr. Hetzel has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Award for Distinguished Research Achievement from the International Association for the

Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability; the Living National Treasure Award, National Trust of Australia; Professor Kazue McLaren Leadership Achievement Award, from the Asia Pacific Academic Consortium in Public Health; and Centenary Medal, Federation of Australia.