

Presentation of the “Albert Szent-Györgyi Commemorative Medal” to Professor Ilona Banga

The Council of the Medical University of Szeged at its 3rd regular meeting founded an “Albert Szent-Györgyi Commemorative Medal” to be presented for the best research results achieved.

According to the rules of presentation “the Council of the Albert Szent-Györgyi Medical University to commemorate the Nobel prize winning Professor decided on the foundation of the Albert Szent-Györgyi Medal to be presented in acknowledgement of outstanding scientific work done for the benefit of the health of mankind and for better cooperation and understanding.

Proposals for the decoration can be made every other year. Persons recommended can be Hungarian and foreign alike, who have achieved outstanding results in the field of medical science and promoted better human understanding”.

Our University wishes to present the first medal to professor Ilona Banga.

Professor Ilona Banga (wife of Professor József Baló), doctor of biological sciences, studied at the Universities of Szeged and Vienna. She obtained her doctor’s degree in 1929, then conducted research in enzymology at the Department of Medical Chemistry and physiological studies with professor Verzár at the Department of Physiology of Debrecen.

Ilona Banga was recommended to Albert Szent-Györgyi — with whom she worked for 17 years — by her professors at the beginning of the 30’s, the first pioneering era of the Department of Medical Chemistry of Szeged Medical University. The main research project at this time was carbohydrate metabolism. The second pioneering era of the Department headed by Albert Szent-Györgyi was between 1940—44. The common research work of Albert Szent-Györgyi and Ilona Banga resulted in the discovery of actin and its isolation from actomyosin. The isolation and characterization of actin are due to the merits of Professor Straub. As to the significance of these research results they would have deserved another Nobel prize if the years of the Second World War had not prevented their publication abroad. When Albert Szent-Györgyi and his male colleagues had to escape to avoid drafting and Nazi persecution, Ilona Banga remained at the Department and thanks to her courage the Department of Medical Chemistry was the only institution of the University where all the equipment and facilities were preserved, including the entire stock of the Klebesberg Library. During the years following the liberation of Hungary by the Soviets, Ilona Banga worked in Budapest. Arteriosclerosis research was her main field of interest and she discovered and isolated elastase, an enzyme dissolving the elastic fibers in walls of blood vessels. For the results of this research project she and her husband József

Baló were awarded the Kossuth Prize in 1955. In the ensuing years she studied connective tissue of blood vessel walls and its changes during the aging process. Her books aroused great interest not only in Hungary but abroad as well.

With these words I wish to present the Albert Szent-Györgyi Commemorative Medal to Professor Ilona Banga with the highest respect and appreciation.