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Kathy Niakan finalist in Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists

Crick group leader Kathy Niakan has been selected as a finalist for the prestigious Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists in the UK for ‘pioneering research in human embryonic development, and blazing a trail to obtain regulatory approval to perform research involving genome-editing in human embryos.’

The awards are run by the Blavatnik Family Foundation and the New York Academy of Sciences, with Finalists and Laureates selected by a jury of leading senior scientists and engineers from across the UK.

“I am honoured and thrilled to be a Finalist for the Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists in the UK,” says Kathy. “It is an amazing recognition of not only the research conducted in the lab but also the rigorous ethical and regulatory oversight with which we conduct research in the UK. This is an area of research that has tremendous potential to offer new knowledge of the basic biological processes at work in the first seven days of human embryo development.

“Our studies are the first steps to understanding which key genes human embryos need to develop successfully and this knowledge may in turn lead to improvements in IVF treatment and increase our understand some causes of pregnancy failure. This sensitive research area has huge potential, so it’s crucial that we proceed cautiously. By working transparently, under regulations developed through public consultation, we hope to show that this research can be done ethically and responsibly.”

The award citation noted that Kathy’s research ‘paves the way for new treatments for infertility and developmental disorders, and her work in scientific policy and advocacy is defining the ethical use of human embryos and stem cells in scientific research.’ Her lab was the first in the world to obtain national regulatory approval to use genome-editing technologies for research in human embryos.

“Recognising and encouraging the brilliant talent of the UK’s best young scientists through the Blavatnik Awards is our honour,” said Sir Leonard Blavatnik, head of the Blavatnik Family Foundation and member of the President’s Council of the New York Academy of Sciences. "By supporting young scientists as they embark on their careers, we create a positive impact on the country’s future prosperity, accelerating scientific discovery and innovation that mankind can benefit from, and encouraging others to follow their path."

https://www.crick.ac.uk/news/2019-01-09_kathy-niakan-finalist-in-blavatnik-awards-for-young-scientists