

Vice Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa, Derek Miles Yellon.

According to the ancient Egyptians, the heart was the most important organ in the body. They believed that the heart, rather than the brain, was the source of human wisdom, as well as emotions, memory, the soul and the personality itself. (In fact, they believed that the only real function of the brain was to pass mucus to the nose, so they removed the brain during mummification^[1].)

Derek Yellon has devoted his life to the study of the heart. He was born in South Africa, has a background in pharmacology and is now Professor of Molecular and Cellular Cardiology at University College London. The early academic indicators were not good. As a schoolboy, he held the record for the highest number of canings in his penultimate year^[2]; he came "about 12th" in his class; he was told by more than one professor that he would never make it and the last time he was in this hall, he was writing an exam that he was sure he would fail.

However, today he is an innovator, a pioneer and a highly respected cardiovascular scientist. He describes himself as a kind of a "heart detective"^[2]. His detection work has focused on solving the puzzle of what happens when the blood and oxygen supply to the heart is abruptly reduced in a heart attack. What distinguishes his work is how it translates from very fundamental scientific laboratory studies (like explaining the mechanisms of protein kinase C signalling^[3]) to clinical studies that have benefits for patients undergoing coronary bypasses^[4]. In other words: really from the "bench to the bedside"^[5].

He's generous, passionate and unassuming. He is driven by his vision and belief in being able to make things happen. He is irritated by the "glass half full" or what he calls: "the intake of breath syndrome" I don't know about that.... When he first set up the academic department of cardiology at UCL, it was in a filthy basement beneath the hospital that nobody else wanted. But he saw the potential and now The Hatter Institute at University College London is an internationally respected centre of academic medicine and science^[5]

He is known for his simple ideas that are "just brilliant"^[6] –the "why didn't I think of that?" ideas. For example, he had the idea to hold a small conference called "Cardiology at the Limits" and invite only a few of the very best people in cardiology to talk about the limits of their knowledge. Very soon, it became **the** meeting to be invited to, The Lancet became a partner, and now there are even some spin offs: Oncology at the Limits and Nephrology at the Limits.

Yellon was also instrumental in establishing the Hatter Cardiovascular Institute at UCT, which hosted the first fifteen of the "Cardiology at the Limits" series.

It is very important to Derek Yellon that his research is not just for its own sake. It is important to him that the cell biology is translated back to clinical cardiology, back to the heart, always returning to the person or the patient.

In the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, the heart of the deceased is shown being weighed against the feather of Ma'at, a symbol of truth and justice^[7]. The crocodile god Ammit consumes the hearts of those found wanting, whilst the wolf god Anubis adjusts the balance of the scales slightly in favour of the deceased. So, instead of being devoured, the heart is returned, and the person is allowed to continue their voyage towards immortality^[7].

Vice Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa, Derek Miles Yellon.

1. Dunn, J. (2011). "Egypt: The Ancient Egyptian Heart." Retrieved 30 November 2012, from <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/heart.htm - ixzz2mlX3tR8C>.
2. Yellon, D.M., *Personal Communication*, 11 November 2013.
3. Speechly-Dick, M., M. Mocanu, and D. Yellon, 1994. *Protein kinase C. Its role in ischemic preconditioning in the rat*. *Circulation research*, **75**(3): p. 586-590.
4. Hausenloy, D.J. and D.M. Yellon, 2009. *Preconditioning and postconditioning: Underlying mechanisms and clinical application*. *Atherosclerosis*, **204**(2): p. 334-341.
5. American Heart Association, 2010. *European Perspectives. Pioneer in Cardiology: Derek Yellon*. *Circulation*, **122**(16): p. f91-f96.
6. Mayosi, B., *Personal Communication*, 12 November 2013.
7. O'Halloran, K., 1997. *Hands-On Culture of Ancient Egypt*: J. Weston Walch.