Black, James Whyte

Scottish physiologist, director of therapeutic research at Wellcome Laboratories (near London) from 1978, who was awarded a Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1988, together with US scientists George Hitchings and Gertrude Elion, for their work on the principles governing the design of new drug treatment. He was active in the development of beta-blockers (which reduce the rate of heartbeat) and anti-ulcer drugs. He was knighted in 1981.

Black, Sir James Whyte

Scottish pharmacologist and Nobel Prize winner

Born in Uddingston, Strathclyde, he graduated in medicine at St Andrews University and became an assistant lecturer in physiology there (1946-47), a lecturer at the University of Malaya and then senior lecturer at Glasgow Veterinary School (1950-58). Following appointments at ICI Pharmaceuticals (1958-64) and the Wellcome Research Laboratories (1978-84) as director of therapeutic research, he was appointed professor of pharmacology and departmental head at University College London (1973-77). He was professor of analytical pharmacology at King's College Medical School in London (1984-93, later emeritus). In 1962 while at ICI he discovered pronethalol, the first beta-blocking drug, which opened the way to new treatments for certain types of heart disease (angina, tachycardia), and led to his development of safer, more effective drugs such as propanolol. At Smith, Kline & French (now GlaxoSmithKline) he played a large part in developing first burimamide, proving the existence of the H₂ class of histamine receptor, and then cimetidine, a drug that targets these receptors in the treatment of stomach ulcers. He was elected FRS in 1976 and knighted in 1981, and shared with Gertrude Elion and George Hitchings the 1988 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine. He was chancellor of Dundee University (1992-2006) and was awarded the Order of Merit in 2000.
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