

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, presented the Young Scientist Award of the Cultural Foundation of the President of the Republic in the Office of the President today to Jaak Kals, senior research specialist in biochemistry and vascular surgeon at the University of Tartu, who focused his studies on the key issues of cardiovascular diseases – the pre-disease assessment of arteries. The award money is 4,800 euros.

"Successfully combining the stressful work of a surgeon and active research activities is worth highlighting and is an example to others. You have demonstrated that young people in Estonia have the opportunity to pursue research activities to an international standard while being an effective, highly valued doctor," told the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, when presenting the award to Jaak Kals.

President Ilves stated that Jaak Kals is working in a very serious and highly useful sphere, both as a doctor and a research specialist. "The incidences of cardiovascular diseases are very high globally and, regrettably, the estimates given by the World Health Organisation are rather bleak – the respective figures are to grow over the next decade. Unfortunately, Estonia is not a positive exception here, rather the opposite. People who have reached their most productive, creative age are hit by the disease, causing their families, next of kin and society in general to suffer the consequences," admitted President Ilves.

Our people represent the greatest asset that Estonia has, he stated, adding: "And we must all see that Estonian people are healthy and active. Of course, prevention and giving tips about positive changes in our lifestyles and habits as well as those of our next of kin play an important role here. However, contemporary and efficient medical health and the implementation of medical research in clinical practice have the highest priority."

According to the specialists who put forward the candidacy of Jaak Kals, the Head of the Institute of Biochemistry of the University of Tartu, Mihkel Zilmer, and the Head of Neurological Clinic of the University of Tartu, Toomas Asser, Mr. Kals represents a rare example of a situation in which a young individual has been able to link a research speciality (endothelial and arterial studies) that represents one of the greatest clinical challenges in international research space with his everyday successful work as a vascular surgeon. He has mostly worked in Estonia and his contribution to developing a close-knit co-operation network, involving many pre-clinical and clinical units in the sphere of modern vascular research in Estonian medicine, at the medical faculty of the University of Tartu, has been considerable.

Jaak Kals is also one of the visionaries, co-ordinators and developers of the first inter-disciplinary centre in Estonia, the Endothelial Research Centre. The research results achieved by this centre are providing the opportunities for developing new treatment and preventive strategies in the sphere of cardiovascular diseases. Vascular research is also one of the best examples of demonstrating how research work is not just a scientific output, but can also be applied in clinical practice. This is the translational medicine that highly developed countries all over the world are focusing on, more and more.

"There are far too many people thinking that they would be better off somewhere else. Having worked at a number of foreign hospitals, I can say, with conviction, that Estonia provides all the required prerequisites for successful international research work," said Jaak Kals today in the Office of the President at the presentation of the award.

Jaak Kals thanked his colleagues and mentors and added that in this sphere, success cannot be achieved by flying solo but only in close co-operation with others.

The Young Scientist Award is presented, once a year, by the Cultural Foundation of the President of the Republic and Funded by Väino Kaldoja.

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