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Professor Kamil Uğurbil receives the 15th Vehbi Koç Award for his contributions to the field of healthcare

KOÇ HOLDING CHAIRMAN ÖMER M. KOÇ:

“VEHBİ KOÇ FOUNDATION HAS BEEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE’S LIVES FOR 47 YEARS”

This year’s winner of the Vehbi Koç Award given out annually by Vehbi Koç Foundation to individuals or institutions for their outstanding contributions to the fields of culture, education and healthcare, respectively is Professor Kamil Uğurbil for his body of work on human brain. Speaking at the award ceremony Koç Holding Chairman Ömer M. Koç said that Vehbi Koç Foundation has been making a difference in the lives of millions for 47 years, and added, “This year’s award is in the field of healthcare. I wholeheartedly congratulate this esteemed scientist for his groundbreaking work on neuroimaging and analyzing the functions of the human brain.”

Vehbi Koç Foundation founded 47 years ago as Turkey’s first private foundation gives out the annual Vehbi Koç Award for culture, education and healthcare, respectively; and this year’s winner was announced at the ceremony attended by members of the Koç family and guests. Among the three candidates nominated by the Selection Committee headed by Professor Turgay Dalkara, Vehbi Koç Foundation’s Board of Directors chose Professor Kamil Uğurbil as the winner of the 15th Vehbi Koç Award for his contributions to healthcare. Professor Uğurbil’s studies on the development of groundbreaking new technologies using magnetic resonance imaging to understand how the brain functions have made it possible to analyze the causes for several diseases such as Alzheimer’s and depression, and to generate solutions. These technologies developed through Professor Uğurbil’s research have become essential in diagnosis of diseases, planning their treatment, and monitoring responses to treatment. Professor Uğurbil accepted the 15th Vehbi Koç Award from Koç Holding Chairman Ömer M. Koç.

Koç Holding Chairman Ömer M. Koç opened his speech during the award ceremony at İş Sanat Cultural Center by remembering the late Mustafa V. Koç. Reminding that the award ceremony normally takes place on February 25, the anniversary of Vehbi Koç’s passing, Ömer M. Koç said, “This year we could only hold the award ceremony today due to our great loss. Earlier this year, on January 21 my brother, Koç Holding Chairman Mustafa V. Koç passed away untimely, leaving us with indescribable grief. Here before you today, I remember him with respect, affection and gratitude. I would like to emphasize once again that we will strive to carry on the values he has entrusted to us both in business and social endeavors to new heights.

Ömer M. Koç: “Vehbi Koç Foundation and we are one big family, adding value to each other’s lives.

Asking the question, “How can a foundation add value to people’s lives, and be a solution for the growth, prosperity and bright future of society?” Ömer M. Koç continued, “The answer to this question can be different for everyone. In my personal opinion, providing direct services, generating knowledge and being an example to other charities are among the primary strategies applied by foundations and civil society institutions in general while contributing to our lives. And Vehbi Koç Foundation has been making a difference in the lives of millions by granting scholarships for the last 47 years, opening educational institutions, and providing outstanding services in the fields of healthcare and culture. Our brilliant scholars, the students and educators in our educational institutions, the patients treated at our hospitals, the guests of our museums, and we are one big family adding value to each other’s lives; a family that keeps on growing every day with the strength of our new projects.”

Ömer M. Koç: “By presenting the Vehbi Koç Award we express our gratitude to well-deserving individuals for their achievements.”

“We also believe that it is very important for the activities that Vehbi Koç Foundation undertakes and the institutions it builds to be examples for others. This is where Vehbi Koç Award comes in. By recognizing the individuals and institutions that have pioneered innovations, achieved significant success, and provided outstanding contributions in the fields of education, culture and healthcare on both national and international platforms, we express our gratitude as a well-deserved thank you, and we also believe that we light the way for the young people that will follow the same path,” said Ömer M. Koç.

Ömer M: Koç: “Nine years ago, Vehbi Koç Award was given to a scientist that many of us hadn’t heard of before...”

“Nine years ago at the award ceremony held at the Rahmi M. Koç Museum, the Vehbi Koç Award was given to a scientist that many of us hadn’t heard of before,” said Ömer M. Koç. “We had witnessed his exemplary life story of in the film prepared for him, and touched by the modest speech he gave after receiving the award. On his way to Turkey for that ceremony, Professor Aziz Sancar told his friends in the USA, ‘I am going to receive the Nobel Prize of Turkey’. Eight years after that, he indeed won the Nobel Prize, making us proud once again. The responsibility of the future Vehbi Koç Award selection committees is now higher than ever.”

Ömer M. Koç: “With the completion of Koç University Hospital investments, the world will gain a superb science and healthcare institution.”

On the occasion of Vehbi Koç Award in healthcare this year, Ömer M. Koç shared some details about Koç Holding’s healthcare initiatives, “As you may be aware we opened Koç

University School of Medicine in the 2010 – 2011 academic year, and Koç University Hospital started operating in Topkapı in late 2014. By the time Koç University Hospital investments are completed in 2017, not only our country and the region, but also the whole world will have gained a superb science and healthcare institution. The fact that a large portion of resources required for an investment of this scale is financed by our foundation-owned American Hospital is also very important to us. The class of 2016 will be the first graduates of the School of Medicine. We sincerely believe that 2016 will be a historic milestone in terms of medical education in Turkey, and wish all the young ‘Koç’ physicians success.”

After presenting the 15th Vehbi Koç Award to Professor Kamil Uğurbil, Ömer M. Koç concluded by saying, “We wholeheartedly congratulate this esteemed scientist for his globally groundbreaking work on neuroimaging and analyzing the functions of the human brain through magnetic resonance imaging methods.”

Professor Kamil Uğurbil: “We have not solved the mystery of the brain yet but we developed a technique widely used by people interested in the brain’s secrets.”

A documentary about Professor Uğurbil, the recipient of the 15th Vehni Koç Award, was shown during the ceremony. Known as the ‘the Turkish man who solved the mystery of the brain’, Professor Uğurbil spoke about his research, “We have not solved the mystery of the brain yet but we developed a technique widely used by people interested in the brain’s secrets. I am among the people that developed the functional MRI technique. I would like to thank you for recognizing not only me but also other scientists with such awards, it is a very meaningful support for the development of science.”

Basis for Selection and about Professor Kamil Uğurbil:

The selection committee headed by Professor Turgay Dalkara, MD and consisting of members Professor Atilla Hıncal, Ph.D., Professor Iskender Sayek, MD, Professor Gökhan Hotamışlıgil, MD, and Professor Şevket Ruacan, MD has expressed their basis for selection as follows:

“Kamil Uğurbil is currently the McKnight Presidential Endowed Chair Professor in Radiology, Neurosciences, and Medicine and is the Director of the Center for Magnetic Resonance Research (CMRR) at the same school. Over 30,000 citations (according to Science Citation Index) and the 93 H index are testament to Professor Uğurbil’s outstanding scientific achievements. To provide a rough comparison, we would like to point out that our source of pride, Nobel laureate and Vehbi Koç Award winner Profesör Aziz Sancar’s works have been cited 33,000 times and have an H index of 100. Professor Uğurbil’s contribution to human health has been the development and application of groundbreaking ultrahigh field magnetic resonance methods for neuroimaging, particularly of the brain, which as an organ inside a box of thick bone is quite challenging to study, making it possible to view and analyze the functions of the human brain without the need for anesthesia. These groundbreaking efforts help us understand better how the brain as the most important organ that makes us human functions, and what happens in brain disorders, such as Alzheimer’s and depression. Professor Uğurbil is not only an important role model for the young scientists in our country but he also provides opportunities for them to work in his laboratory, and is an advisor for Bilkent University National Magnetic Resonance research Center.”

Prof. Uğurbil was educated at Robert College, Istanbul (high school) and Columbia University, New York, N.Y. After completing his B.A. and Ph.D. degrees in physics, and chemical physics, respectively, at Columbia, he joined AT&T Bell Laboratories in 1977, and subsequently returned to Columbia as a faculty member in 1979. He was recruited to the University of Minnesota in 1982 where his research in magnetic resonance led to the evolution of his laboratory into an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary research center, the CMRR.

The work that introduced magnetic resonance imaging of neuronal activity in the human brain (known as fMRI) was accomplished independently and simultaneously in two laboratories around the world, one of which was Uğurbil's in CMRR. Since then, his primary focus has been the development and application of methods capable of obtaining high resolution and high accuracy functional and anatomical information in the human brain. This body of work has culminated in unique accomplishments, such as the first time imaging of a live human’s primary visual cortex with almost microscopic accuracy, and involved the introduction and development of 7 Tesla and higher instrumentation for functional and anatomical imaging (the first 7 Tesla imaging device used on humans was developed in 1999 by CMRR). Professor Uğurbil is also one of the Co-Principle Investigators of Human Connectome Project, in which the Obama administration is highly interested. Professor Uğurbil’s extraordinary body of work has been recognized by several awards and honors to date including,

- Richard Ernst Medal (ETH, Zurich)
- Election to the National Academy of Medicine, USA
- Election to the Academy of Arts and Science, USA
- Election to the National Academy of Inventors, USA
- Membership in NIH Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative Working Group
- Gold Medal, International Society of Magnetic Resonance in Medicine (ISMRM)
- Human Connectome Project Award from NIH, Co-Principle Investigator
- Membership in the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
- Honorary Doctorate (Doctorate Honoris Causa), Maastricht University, Netherlands
- Honorary Doctorate (Doctorate Honoris Causa), Utrecht University, the Netherlands
- Irma T. Hirschl Career Scientist Award
- Hammett Award for Original Outstanding Research
- Columbia University, Graduate Faculties Alumni Scholar

About Vehbi Koç Foundation:

Founded by the doyen Turkish industrialist, the late Vehbi Koç on January 17, 1969, **Vehbi Koç Foundation** is celebrating its 47th anniversary this year, and is justly proud of the support extended to thousands of students, and of the numerous works provided to Turkey. Since its inception as **Turkey's first private foundation**, its aim has been to provide pioneering and exemplary services to improve the quality of life in the fields of **education, healthcare and culture** in order to contribute to a modern and developing Turkey. Vehbi Koç Foundation has built several institutions in the areas of education, healthcare and culture for Turkey, and supported hundreds of projects. The number of students, which Vehbi Koç Foundation has supported with scholarships in the last 47 years, now exceeds fifty thousand. News and developments about Vehbi Koç Foundation can be found at www.vkv.org.tr.

About Vehbi Koç Award:

Aiming to recognize and reward exemplary services that add value to the society, the **Vehbi Koç Award** is given out annually in the areas of education, healthcare, and culture since 2002. Worth \$100,000, it is the highest financial award given out in Turkey. The previous recipients of the award are:

- 2002 - **Topkapı Palace Museum** for their invaluable cultural activities
- 2003 - **Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV)** for their successful educational initiatives

- 2004 - **Bilkent University School of Sciences, Department of Biology and Genetics** for their contributions to healthcare
- 2005 - **Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca** in literature, as a sub-category of culture,
- 2006 - **Nuri Okutan, the then Governor of Sakarya** for his contributions to pre-school education during his career
- 2007 – **Professor Aziz Sancar** in the area of healthcare for his globally recognized studies on the Molecular Mechanisms of DNA Repair and Regulation of the Biological Clock
- 2008 - **Professor Mehmet Özdoğan** for his contributions to prehistoric archaeology in the Marmara Region
- 2009 - **Professor Türkan Saylan** for her life-long commitment to education
- 2010 - **Professor Turgay Dalkara** for his international achievements in cerebrovascular diseases
- 2011 - **Professor Filiz Ali**, regarded the most productive and influential musical authority, musicologist and music critic in Turkey, and the **Ayvalık International Music Academy (AIMA)** she founded as an institution that not only empowers young musicians by opening new horizons but is also recognized both locally and internationally as a successful transformation project.
- 2012 - **Professor Nermin Abadan Unat**, known as the "Master of masters" who taught Political Science to hundreds of students and academicians, for being a prominent scholar and pioneering researcher in the field of "Women" and "International Migration".
- 2013 - **Professor Gökhan Hotamışlıgil** for his discoveries that completely changed the medical world's perception of metabolic diseases
- 2014 – **Professor Zeynep Çelik** for her invaluable studies and research on Ottoman architecture, culture and urban life that have contributed to the world and Ottoman history.
- 2015 - **Professor Ali Nesin** who has devoted his life to science and mathematics, contributing greatly to the society through his work to encourage young people to take an interest in mathematics, and the **Mathematics Village Project**.