

the heiligendamm round table

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alan b scott & eric a johnson – the invention of botulinum toxin therapy

botulinum toxin has been infamous as a food poison and as a biological weapon. its toxicity was and still is notorious. suggesting to use it as a therapeutic agent was probably last century's weirdest idea. it certainly turned out to be one of its most creative and productive one: it offers treatment for a large number of conditions with many of them virtually untreatable before. it also had a huge economic impact with a whole new industry generated from scratch.

for dystonia the impact of botulinum toxin therapy was tremendous. botulinum toxin therapy is, without controversy, the treatment of choice for the by far largest group of dystonia patients. and, apart from this, it was pivotal for the development of the dystonia concept by stanley fahn and c david marsden. without the exploding number of dystonia patients gaining neurological attention dystonia would still be seen as a rare disease.

it took two people to develop botulinum toxin therapy: the physician as the visionary and inventor and the basic scientist providing facts and skills to make this vision real.

ladies and gentleman, dear colleagues! i am proud today to present to you these two people: dr alan b scott and dr eric a johnson. this is an even greater moment as i believe that this is the first time that both appear together on one stage.

let's hear about one of the most remarkable events in the history of medicine by the personal recollections of the two persons in charge.

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organisation: dirk dressler, md, phd



alan b scott

alan b scott studied medical sciences at the university of california berkeley and finished his medical education at the university of california san francisco in 1956. he took an internship in surgery and a residency in neurosurgery at the university of minnesota and continued his residency in ophthalmology at stanford university medical school and california pacific medical center, san francisco. he is a board-certified ophthalmologist. from 1960 until 2016 he was senior scientist, co-director and executive director of the smith-kettlewell eye research institute in san francisco. he specialised in strabismus and paediatric ophthalmology. he invented the botulinum toxin therapy and manufactured - together with edward schantz and eric a johnson - the first botulinum toxin drug. he sold his company in 1991 to allergan who developed - together with portion down from the uk - the now global botulinum toxin market with estimated annual sales in excess of 4.5 billion us dollars. currently he is senior scientist at the strabismus research foundation in san francisco and continues to run a busy ophthalmological practice at the california pacific medical center. he received numerous prestigious national and international awards including the lifetime award of the international neurotoxin association at the time when i served on the board of directors.

eric a johnson

born in 1956 in san francisco, eric a johnson graduated from university of california davis in 1978 in fermentation and food science and received his dsc in 1983 from the massachusetts institute of technology. after posts at harvard medical school and the national institutes of health he joined university of wisconsin madison where he is currently professor of bacteriology. his research focusses on food microbiology, toxicology and biodefense. together with the late edward j schantz he provided alan b scott with the first botulinum toxin for therapeutic use. he is one of the best experts on international botulinum toxin manufacturing and, hence, a sought after consultant to the pharmaceutical industry. he has published more than 200 peer-reviewed papers and numerous book chapters and holds a large number of patents on botulinum toxin.

