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Boston University Names Avrum Spira its Innovator of the Year

(Boston) – Boston University School of Medicine Associate Prof. Avrum Spira has won the university’s 2011 Innovator of the Year award which recognizes a BU faculty member whose cutting-edge research and ideas lead to the formation of companies that benefit society at large.

Spira’s research on lung cancer, Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (COPD), and the effects of smoking on airway epithelial cell-gene expression sparked development of a technology that allows for a non-invasive method for the early detection of lung-cancer. With this technology, Spira and BU colleague Dr. Jerome Brody founded Allegro Diagnostics of Maynard, Mass.

BU Provost and Chief Academic Officer Jean Morrison presented this year’s Innovator of the Year award at Tech, Drugs and Rock & Roll -- BU’s annual networking event for individuals involved in Technology Transfer in the Boston area.

“Professor Spira is an entrepreneurial scientist, whose practical approach to science has led to the formation of Allegro Diagnostics, a startup company intent on producing beneficial molecular diagnostics for detecting lung cancer,” said Morrison. “His accomplishments in the past year include 14 peer-reviewed papers published, one invention disclosure, two patent filings, over \$3.5 million in NIH funding and \$8.9 million invested in Allegro Diagnostics.”

In addition to being an Associate Professor of Medicine, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Spira attends in the Boston University Medical Center’s Medical Intensive Care Unit and he is Chief of the Division of Computational Biomedicine. He also directs the Translational Bioinformatics core within BU’s Clinical and Translational Science Institute.

A native of Montreal, Spira earned his medical degree from McGill University and did his internship and residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Toronto. He completed a pulmonary and critical care medicine fellowship and received a master's degree in bioinformatics from the BU College of Engineering.

The Boston University Innovator of the Year award highlights translational research at BU by recognizing an entrepreneurial faculty member and the potential for commercialization and/or wider adoption of their inventions. It also encourages faculty to become entrepreneurial while promoting role models who can inspire graduate students to pursue entrepreneurial careers.

“It was a difficult decision to choose Avi as the Innovator of Year as it was strong year for successful BU faculty spinoffs,” said BU Office of Technology Development Managing Director Vinit Nijhawan.

Founded in 1839, Boston University is an internationally recognized private research university with more than 30,000 students participating in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. As Boston University’s largest academic division, the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences is the heart of the BU experience with a global reach that enhances the University’s reputation for teaching and research.

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