Samuel Danishefsky

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Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center chemist Samuel J. Danishefsky will be honored with three major awards this spring. Dr. Danishefsky is the incumbent of a Eugene W. Kettering Chair and a member of the Molecular Pharmacology and Chemistry Program in the Sloan Kettering Institute (SKI). He is also a professor of chemistry at Columbia University.

Dr. Danishefsky is an internationally recognized leader in chemistry, specializing in the synthesis of biologically active organic compounds. Because these molecules tend to be very large, their synthesis can involve many complicated steps in the laboratory. He is especially known for his work in the area of natural products. For the past several years, part of his work has focused on the synthesis of a class of anticancer drugs called the epothilones, a few of which are in early stage clinical trials. In addition, he is renowned for

his strategies for designing complex oligosaccharide molecules, such as those used in anticancer vaccines.

In late April, Dr. Danishefsky will receive the 2006 Award in Chemical Sciences from the National Academy of Sciences. The prize, awarded annually since 1979, recognizes innovative research in the chemical sciences that, in the broad sense, contributes to the understanding of the natural sciences and to the benefit of humanity.

Also in April, Dr. Danishefsky will receive the Benjamin Franklin Medal in Chemistry from the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. The Franklin Institute was founded in 1824, and its awards have been presented for nearly two centuries to historic and prestigious scientists, including Niels Bohr, Max Planck, Marie Curie, and Albert Einstein.

In May, Dr. Danishefsky will also receive the Bristol-Myers Squibb Distinguished Achieve-ment Award in Organic Synthesis. The award recognizes an established leader in the field of organic synthesis. Dr. Danishefsky is being honored for his work in anticancer natural products, in anticancer vaccines, and in the development of new strategies and methodologies in chemical synthesis.

“Sam Danishefsky is one of a kind,” said Sloan Kettering Institute Director Thomas J. Kelly . “He does basic science at the very highest level, but he also focuses on problems that can be translated into practical benefit for patients. He is a wonderful colleague and a tremendous asset to our institution. I couldn’t be more delighted that he will be the recipient of these prestigious awards. It is important to recognize that previous recipients of the NAS Award in Chemical Sciences and the Franklin Medal in Chemistry have included many of the greatest chemists of the last century. Sam’s accomplishments in the total synthesis of natural products and his seminal work in carbohydrate chemistry clearly place him in this august company.”

Dr. Danishefsky earned his BS degree from Yeshiva University, his PhD degree from Harvard University, and conducted postdoctoral research at Columbia with Gilbert Stork. In 1996, Drs. Danishefsky and Stork shared the Wolf Prize. Dr. Danishefsky has previously won the American Chemical Society Award for Creative Work in Chemical Synthesis, the Cope Medal, and the Tetrahedron Prize, among others, as well as membership in the National Academy of Sciences. He joined Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in 1991 after serving on the faculties of both the University of Pittsburgh and Yale University.