



GFP: Lighting up life

Martin Chalfie, PhD

Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP) and other fluorescent proteins revolutionized the biological sciences by allowing scientists to look at the inner workings of living cells in a dynamic rather than static way. The story of the discovery and development of GFP provides an example of how scientific progress is often made: through accidental discoveries, the willingness to ignore previous assumptions and the combined efforts of many people. The story of GFP shows the importance of pursuing basic research on non-traditional organisms.

Martin Chalfie is a University Professor at Columbia University. He obtained his PhD from Harvard University and did post-doctoral research with Sydney Brenner at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge, Mass., before moving to Columbia University in 1982. His research has been directed toward answering two different biological questions: How do different types of nerve cells acquire and maintain their unique characteristics? How do sensory cells respond to mechanical signals? He shared the 2008 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his introduction of Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP) as a biological marker.

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