

Citation: Professor Michael Alpers

Wednesday 19 September 2012, 10:00am

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present to you, Professor Michael Alpers.

Professor Michael Alpers is being admitted to the degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa), as a person who has made distinguished creative contributions in the service of society.

Professor Alpers is a graduate of the University of Adelaide holding a Bachelor of Science as well as a Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery from this university.

He is currently the John Curtin Distinguished Professor of International Health at Curtin University.

Professor Alpers is internationally recognised for his work over the past 50 years in studying the fatal neurological disease *kuru*, which was endemic to the Fore, a small cultural group in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, until the last century.

The last *kuru* sufferer died in 2005, but Professor Alpers has continued his active field surveillance in the *Fore* communities. No new cases of *kuru* have appeared since then and this devastating illness is considered to have died out and the epidemic has been declared to have ended.

Professor Alpers' work on *kuru* has been fundamental to our understanding of one of the most confounding protein conformational diseases - commonly known as mad cow disease, which is caused by the aggregation of the prion protein and results in Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease or CJD in humans.

His collaborative studies on the incubation period and the genetics of *kuru* have provided major insight on how CJD may continue to evolve in populations where it is incubating, for example in the United Kingdom.

Professor Alpers' painstaking research and tireless dedication into understanding *kuru* have been the main reasons behind the disease's eradication and, in the broader context, have greatly enhanced our understanding of CJD and other protein conformational neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's - diseases that are rising dramatically as the population ages and for which there is currently no effective treatment, let alone cure.

I am very pleased and proud to present to you Chancellor, for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa) — Professor Michael Alpers.