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Sunil Sukumaran Named Morley R. Kare Research Associate

PHILADELPHIA – Sunil K. Sukumaran, PhD, has been named the Monell Center’s 2018-2020 Morley R. Kare Research Associate. Sukumaran, a neuroscientist, uses advanced genetic approaches and bioinformatics to gain insights into the different types of taste cells, including how they differentiate from precursor stem cells and what molecules underlie their responses to different types of taste compounds.

As the Kare Research Associate, Sukumaran will receive two years of salary support, as well as funding for research supplies.

The Kare Fellowship was established in 1990 to honor the vision of Monell’s founding Director, Morley Kare, PhD, who recognized the importance of nurturing young scientists to become leaders in the chemical senses. Support for the Fellowship is provided by donations from Dr. Kare’s family and friends, other individual donors, and the Monell Foundation.

Joining a distinguished list of Monell junior faculty, Sukumaran is the first Monell research associate to be awarded a Kare Fellowship.

"As the next generation of independent scientists, Monell’s hard-working research associates are essential to the Center’s scientific success," said Monell Director Robert Margolskee, MD, PhD.

Sukumaran’s research focuses on understanding the mechanisms underlying sweet, salty and fat taste qualities and taste cell differentiation and development. Using next-generation DNA sequencing, he has published several important papers that advance understanding of how different taste cells function by identifying which specific genes they express.

“Sunil’s work at the intersection of technology and biology has been incredibly productive,” said Margolskee. “He has applied cutting-edge techniques of high-throughput DNA sequencing on individual taste cells to identify previously unknown



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molecules underlying sweet and salty taste transduction. Other work has contributed importantly to our understanding of how taste stem/precursor cells differentiate into all the different types of mature taste receptor cells.”

Sukumaran received his doctoral degree in genetics from the University of Cologne in Germany and went on to conduct postdoctoral studies in the United States at the National Institutes of Health. He joined Monell in 2010 to continue his postdoctoral studies in Margolskee’s laboratory and was promoted to Research Associate in 2015.

“The Kare fellowship is an ideal bridge to an independent career in chemosensory research,” said Sukumaran. “I am truly humbled and very grateful to my mentor and Monell Director Robert Margolskee and to Associate Director Danielle Reed for this honor. Monell is a wonderful place with some of the best minds in chemosensory research. I look forward to working with my colleagues here to continue my work on the mechanisms of taste signaling and taste cell differentiation.”

The Monell Chemical Senses Center is an independent nonprofit basic research institute based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Founded in 1968 and now celebrating its 50th anniversary, Monell builds on its legacy of advancing scientific understanding of the mechanisms and functions of taste and smell to benefit human health and well-being. Using an interdisciplinary approach, scientists collaborate in the programmatic areas of sensation and perception; neuroscience and molecular biology; environmental and occupational health; nutrition and appetite; health and well-being; development, aging and regeneration; and chemical ecology and communication. For more information about Monell, visit www.monell.org.

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