



Embargoed for release at 9:30 a.m. CT on March 4, 2026.

For More Information:

Nicole Winston-Ramirez 847-384-4162

winston-ramirez@aaos.org

Deanna Killackey 847-384-4035

killackey@aaos.org

Johnny Huard, PhD, Receives the Arnold I. Caplan Award for Distinguished Research in Orthobiologics

New Orleans (March 4, 2026)—The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) announced Johnny Huard, PhD, as the recipient of the Arnold I. Caplan Award for Distinguished Research in Orthobiologics (Caplan Award). This prestigious recognition honors the legacy of [Arnold Caplan](#), PhD, a pioneer in the field of orthobiologics and Medicinal Signaling Cells (MSCs), by recognizing exceptional, sustained contributions that advance biologics-based solutions for musculoskeletal injuries and disease.

The Caplan Award recognizes Dr. Huard for nearly three decades of groundbreaking research focused on adult stem cells and their role in tissue regeneration and repair. Among his most significant discoveries is the identification and isolation of MSCs from adult skeletal muscle, also known as muscle-derived stem cells (MDSCs). These cells exhibit key stem cell characteristics and have been widely used in tissue engineering and regenerative medicine applications to treat tissues affected by injury, disease and aging.

Dr. Huard is the Chief Scientific Officer and Director of the Linda & Mitch Hart Center for Regenerative and Personalized Medicine at Steadman Philippon Research Institute (SPRI) in Vail, Colo. His work has helped define both the origin and mechanism of action of MSCs. Dr. Huard's research demonstrated that these cells reside within blood vessels, directly supporting Dr. Caplan's long-held assertion that all MSCs originate as perivascular cells. Further, Dr. Huard advanced the field by showing MSCs exert their therapeutic effect primarily through paracrine signaling, releasing bioactive factors that drive angiogenesis, regeneration, and repair. Through this characterization and investigation of bioactive factors, Dr. Huard and his team in Vail have broadened their research portfolio to include the therapeutic benefit of extracellular vesicles, in addition to MSCs.

"Dr. Caplan challenged the field to rethink how mesenchymal stem cells function and how they contribute to tissue homeostasis and repair," said Dr. Huard. "Our work helped provide the biological context and experimental evidence to support his vision, that MSCs' primary role is signaling, not replacement. It is an honor to receive an award that bears his name and to contribute to a body of science that continues to shape regenerative medicine and orthopaedic care."

"Dr. Huard has been a leader and innovator in biologics research for over thirty years," said Marc J. Philippon, MD, Chairman of SPRI. "We are grateful to AAOS's recognition of Dr. Huard's commitment to advancing the field of regenerative medicine research and his dedication to improving patient care."

AAOS Committee on Devices, Biologics and Technology Chair, Jason L. Dragoo, MD, FAAOS, praised Dr. Huard's body of work for its lasting impact on both science and patient care. He noted: "Dr. Caplan laid the groundwork by transforming our understanding of mesenchymal stem cells and their role in tissue repair. Dr. Huard's research provided critical biological and clinical context for that vision, helping to establish MSCs as pericytes and advancing the concept of Medicinal Signaling Cells. His work exemplifies the innovative spirit that continues to drive meaningful progress in orthobiologics and improve outcomes for patients."

Created through the generosity of the Caplan family with funding overseen by the Orthopaedic Research and Education Foundation (OREF), the Caplan Award recognizes excellence in orthobiologics research. The award includes a desktop recognition piece and a \$10,000 monetary prize.

To read the research impact statement, click [here](#). For more information about AAOS' investment in evidence-based orthobiologics education, visit www.aaos.org/quality.

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About AAOS

With more than 39,000 members, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons is the world's largest medical association of musculoskeletal specialists. AAOS is the trusted leader in advancing musculoskeletal health. It provides the highest quality, most comprehensive education to help orthopaedic surgeons and allied health professionals at every career level to best treat patients in their daily practices. AAOS is the source for information on bone and joint conditions, treatments, and related musculoskeletal healthcare issues; and it leads the healthcare discussion on advancing quality.

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About the Orthopaedic Research and Education Foundation (OREF)

An independent 501(c)3 nonprofit, OREF strives to improve clinical care and patient outcomes by advancing innovative research, developing new investigators, and uniting the orthopaedic community in promoting musculoskeletal health. The Foundation raises funds to support research on diseases and injuries of bones, nerves, muscles, and tendons and to enhance clinical care leading to improved health, increased activity, and a better quality of life for patients. For more information, visit oref.org or follow OREF on [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#).