

Stem cell pioneer mentioned for Nobel Prize

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In this Dec. 10, 1962 file photo, medicine laureate James Watson, right, receives his Nobel prize from Sweden's King Gustaf VI Adolf. Watson shared the prize with Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins. Watson was the co-discoverer with Francis Crick of the DNA molecule structure. Famous Nobel winners include Albert Einstein, James Watson, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Winston Churchill. But most winners are relatively anonymous until they suddenly are catapulted into the global spotlight by a phone call from a Nobel Prize juror with a Scandinavian accent. (AP photo/Scanpix Sweden/fls Pressens Bild)

(AP) -- A Japanese researcher who discovered how to make stem cells from ordinary skin cells and avoid the ethical quandaries of making them from human eggs could be a candidate for the medicine award when the 2010 Nobel Prize announcements kick off Monday, experts

said.

Several prominent Nobel guessers have pointed to Kyoto University Professor Shinya Yamanaka as a potential winner of the coveted award.

Yamanaka in 2007 discovered how to tinker with human [skin cells](#) so they behave like [embryonic stem cells](#), which can potentially morph into things like heart and [nerve cells](#), as well as lead to new therapies for currently incurable diseases.

The tightlipped Nobel committees give no hints about who is in the running before presenting their decisions.

The medicine award is the first of the six prizes to be announced Monday, followed by physics on Tuesday, chemistry Wednesday, literature on Thursday, the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday and economics on Monday Oct. 11.

After the unusual ruckus caused by honoring [Barack Obama](#) with the peace prize less than nine months into his presidency, Nobel experts believe the peace prize committee in Oslo will opt for a more low-profile choice this year.

"I do not foresee a similar level of risk-taking as last year," says Kristian Berg Harpviken, Director of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo.

Both Swedish Radio and science writer Karin Bojs of newspaper Dagens Nyheter - who has a good track record in guessing medicine winners - had Yamanaka among their top picks for this year's award.

"The outlook for the future is vertiginous," Bojs wrote about Yamanaka's discovery. "It triggers dreams that any little cell from me can be made into new teeth, new knee joints, cure diabetes, multiple

sclerosis and Parkinson's disease."

The Japanese scientist received the Lasker Award in 2009 for his discovery, which has been embraced by scientists around the world because it doesn't entail getting stem cells from embryos.

Many winners of the Lasker Award - often dubbed "America's Nobel" - go on to win Nobel Prizes.

Yamanaka could share the award with Canadian stem cell researchers Ernest McCulloch and James Till, for their early 1970's identification of stem cells, or with British cloning pioneer John Gurdon.

In its annual predictions, the scientific division of Thomson Reuters also put forward American scientists Douglas Coleman and Jeffrey Friedman as candidates for their discovery of a hormone regulating appetite, which has led to breakthroughs in research on obesity.

Other possibilities include American scientist Ralph Steinman for his discovery of cells that regulate immune responses and the American-French trio Ronald Evans, Elwood Jensen and Pierre Chambon for their research on nuclear hormone receptors.

The Nobel Prizes, created by Swedish industrialist Alfred Nobel, were first handed out in 1901, five years after his death. Each award includes 10 million Swedish kronor (about \$1.5 million), a diploma and a gold medal.

Famous Nobel winners include Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill, and James Watson and Francis Crick, who discovered the molecular structure of DNA. But most winners are relatively anonymous until they suddenly are catapulted into the global spotlight by a phone call from a [Nobel Prize](#) juror with a

Scandinavian accent.

More information: Nobel Foundation: <http://nobelprize.org>

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