The UC Davis stem cell program will benefit from $20 million in state funding for its $62 million specialized research facility in Sacramento following approval today from the governing board of the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine (CIRM). The grant is the largest UC Davis has received to date for stem cell research.

UC Davis was one of 12 institutions in California to receive funding from CIRM's Major Facilities Grant Program. It is among seven entities around the state that now will be designated as "CIRM Institutes," meaning that its work will focus on three key categories in regenerative medicine: basic and discovery stem cell research, preclinical (translational) research, and preclinical development and clinical research.

The grant helps expedite renovations already under way at the university's Sacramento campus on a research facility for regenerative medicine that eventually will create 100,000 square feet of space. The existing building on Stockton Boulevard is being redesigned to meet the immediate- and near-term needs of a rapidly growing stem cell program. Plans call for the facility to be a major hub for research and collaboration among scientists and clinicians in a variety of academic departments both in Davis and in Sacramento.

"Our entire building is being built with an eye toward clinical trials and discovering cures for patients in need," said Jan Nolta, director of the stem cell program at UC Davis. "In the coming year, our stem cell research facility will house what we're calling 'disease teams,' groups of scientists and clinicians who will work together to develop treatments and cures for patients. We're planning to begin clinical trials using adult stem cell treatments almost as soon as the doors are opened in the summer of 2009."

The initial phase of renovation creates approximately 54,000 feet of space and will include the following:

- FDA-approved Good Manufacturing Practice facility
- Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) barrier facility
- Basic ("discovery") research laboratory space
- Translational research space in an open, wet-bench laboratory
- Stem cell storage bank
- Fluorescence-activated cell sorting core space
- Laboratory support areas, including dedicated workrooms and conference rooms
- Central corridor space, with areas for meeting and collaboration

"What is so important about this grant," said Ann Bonham, executive associate dean for Academic Affairs and a professor of pharmacology and internal medicine, "is that it greatly expands our research capacity, providing a vital portion of support for a cutting-edge facility that will bring together teams working toward therapies for a variety of diseases and medical conditions. Under one roof, we'll have physician researchers and stem cell scientists working on everything from kidney, heart and lung diseases to bladder reconstruction, vascular disease and neurodegenerative disorders like Parkinson's, Huntington's and Alzheimer's disease."
Chief’s Message

Colleagues,

I would like to dedicate this issue of Hem/Onc Newsletter to Ms. Eileen Boland. Derick’s memorial essay on Eileen provides an excellent summary on her many contributions to the Division. She will be remembered.

Although I have never met Dr. Lois O’Grady, I have learned that she was an excellent teacher and an outstanding clinician and administrator. She was a pioneer of our Division, and had established a solid foundation for our Division to be successful. She too will be remembered.

I would like to congratulate and thank Jan and Gerhard for their success in competing for the 20 million dollar grant support from CIRM for the stem cell research facility and GMP facility. This will greatly strengthen our division’s laboratory and translational research.

The search for faculty in the areas of clinical stem cell transplant and clinical investigation are on-going and I am hoping to be able to share good news in our next newsletter.

Kit

Helen Chew, M.D.—Faculty Award - 2008

Dr. Helen Chew has made exceptional contributions to breast cancer care, education and research here at UC Davis. She has a reputation as a superb breast cancer clinician, and serves as the regional breast cancer expert for community medical oncologists. She has lectured on breast culture to lay groups as part of the Cancer Center outreach efforts, and is the recipient of the Joyce Raley Teal Community Service Award. Dr. Chew has also gained a reputation as a highly skilled teacher, participating at all levels of education from 4th year medical students to highly rated CME lectures. She is one of four core faculty members who have developed and nurtured a highly innovative retreat which teaches communication skills to hematology oncology fellows. Dr. Chew is also a highly productive researcher, and is consistently willing to mentor fellows, residents, and students in research projects. Her commitment to all of the missions of the University makes her a highly deserving recipient of the Faculty Award.

Kit Lam, M.D., Ph.D.—2007 Dean’s Award for Excellence in Mentoring

Dr. Kit Lam has mentored many students, post-doctoral fellows, and junior faculty in laboratory-translational research. He was awarded the 2007 Dean’s Award for Excellence in Mentoring last Spring.

Professional Activities


Jan Nolta, Ph.D., Director of the UC Davis Stem Cell Program, became the Associate Editor of the journal Stem Cells in late February, 2008. In the same month, she also received a Huntington’s Disease Society of America Distinguished Leadership Award. Dr. Nolta was featured as Keynote Speaker in the Distinguished Lecturer Series at The Saban Research Institute of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and at The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University in March. She lectured in and chaired the session on “Stem Cells for Regenerative Medicine” at the February meeting of the American Society for Bone Marrow Transplantation.

Dr. Nolta recently authored or co-authored the following papers in 2008:


Nolta and her colleagues have the results of a new study on the safety of gene therapy using adult stem cells published online on May 6, 2008 in Molecular Therapy. “After studies in France, the gene therapy community felt that further biosafety testing was warranted,” Gerhard Bauer, lead author and assistant professor, said. Nolta and Bauer have worked on eighteen cell and gene therapy clinical therapy trials during their 12 years as colleagues, and they are “ready to use the same model to test the safety of embryonic stem cell-based therapies to fulfill the promise of regenerative medicine.”

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Memorial to Eileen Boland

By Derick Lau, M.D., Ph.D.

I knew Eileen for 14 years, ever since she started working at the Cancer Center in 1993. Eileen was indeed a woman with courage and a woman dedicated to her work.

Three years ago, she returned from a vacation in Europe. She became very sick with pneumonia. She was on a respirator in the intensive care unit for over seen days at Mercy Hospital. I went to see her in the hospital after she was extubated. She was very weak and she appeared in a catatonic state. She did not seem to recognize me. I was disheartened as I was afraid that she unlikely would recover. She was in the hospital for almost five weeks. To my pleasant surprise, she made a miraculous recovery and returned to work in about a month! After her return, she performed her work with her usual rigor and positive attitude.

Bad luck did not strike only once. One year later, she presented with anemia and was diagnosed with metastatic esophageal cancer. The average survival for a patient with metastatic esophageal cancer is about 10 to 12 months. Instead of keeping the bad news to herself and becoming withdrawn like most people would do, Eileen openly announced the diagnosis and vowed to fight it. Surely, she fought a courageous battle over a period of 20 months. After the first round of chemotherapy, we were encouraged by the news of a complete response. She continued coming to work while on chemotherapy and rarely missed a day of work. On Tuesdays and Fridays, she came to work before 7 o’clock in the morning for preparation of conferences and Fellow interviews. On several occasions, I had to remind her that she looked pale and might require a blood transfusion for anemia. Subsequently, she underwent another two regimens of chemotherapy. While she was undergoing radiation last December, she was still talking about coming back to work. Her work ethic was truly exemplary.

Eileen had taught us invaluable lessons --- the lesson of having courage to face challenges in life and the lesson of dedication to work, which I will never forget.

In Memory of Pioneering Faculty Member

Lois F. O'Grady, M.D., 71, died at her home in Sacramento on December 23, 2007. The daughter of William G. and Georgina Murphy O'Grady, she was born in Medford, Massachusetts. She graduated from Simmons College, Boston in 1958 and received her medical degree from the Boston University School of Medicine in 1962. Following residency training in internal medicine and fellowship training in hematology and oncology at Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital, Chicago (now Rush University Medical Center) in 1967 she became one of the earliest faculty members of the then-new University of California, Davis School of Medicine, rising through the academic ranks to become Professor.

During her career she received a number of honors. In 1972 her teaching skills were rewarded with a Citation for Distinguished Teaching by the University of California, Davis. Simmons College awarded her their Achievement Award for 1980 and in 1981 she received a Distinguished Alumna Award from Boston University School of Medicine. She was the Vice Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine at Davis from 1973 to 1977. Between 1976 and 1979 she served as the Associate Dean of Student Affairs for the Davis medical school and in 1989-1990 she was the Chief of Staff for the University of California, Davis Medical Center. She was elected President of the Sacramento chapter of the American Cancer Society in 1995. In her clinical practice she was widely respected as an expert on breast cancer. She wrote numerous papers and in 1995 she was co-author of the book "A Practical Approach to Breast Disease."

Her interests outside of medicine included travel, frequently to remote places, and she made many trips to Africa developing a deep interest in the arts of Africa. She was a skilled needlework artisan incorporating African themes in her creations.
Providing a Comprehensive Look at Cancer

Moon S. Chen Jr., Ph.D., professor, hematology/oncology and associate director for cancer disparities and research at UC Davis Cancer Center, recently was a guest lecturer in the "Cancer as a Process" course for fourth-year students at the UC Davis School of Medicine during National Minority Health Month (April).

Marlene M. von Friederichs-Fitzwater, Ph.D., assistant adjunct professor, and director, Outreach Research & Education, UC Davis Cancer Center, is IOR for the daily, four-week course that covers risk factors, prevention, screening, thorough diagnosis, treatment options, survivorship, palliative care, hospice care and end-of-life concerns. Discussions of disparities are woven throughout the class.

The course is intended to increase awareness among medical students about the continuum of cancer from diagnosis through survivorship and disparities in cancer prevention, control and treatment.

Von Friederichs-Fitzwater invites clinicians, bench scientists and behavioral scientists to make guest presentations to the class, which is in its second year.

Chen's lecture was titled "Facilitators and Barriers to Reducing Cancer Health Disparities: Examples From Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Populations." Fred Meyers, M.D. and Phil Mack, Ph.D., are the co-IORs, Ralph de vere White, M.D. is the program director, and other participating faculty include Richard Bold, M.D., Helen Chew, M.D., Scott Christensen, M.D., GiGi Chen, M.D., Joshua Fenton, M.D., Robert Cardiff, M.D., Cliff Tepper, Ph.D., John Linder, Ph.D., Hao Nguyen, Ph.D., (cancer biologist from Sacramento State), Regina Gandour-Edwards, M.D., Ted Wun, M.D., Michael O'Malley, M.D., MPH, Jerroid Bushberg, Ph.D., Marcia Hartman, MS, Kermit Carraway, Ph.D., Paul Kaesberg, M.D., Helen Rice, RN, MSN and a panel of patients/survivors.

Students completed a final paper and presented their work during the last two class sessions.

Professional Activities (continued)

Chong-xian Pan, M.D., Ph.D., was recently awarded a VA Merit Career Development Award to use combinatorial chemistry approaches to develop bladder cancer-specific ligands for diagnosis, imaging and targeted therapy of bladder superficial bladder cancer. He was also awarded a $2.39 million California Institute for Regenerative Medicine New Faculty Award to use combinatorial chemistry approaches to develop ligands that specifically target leukemia stem cells and determine the efficacy in capturing and purging of leukemia stem cells and in immunoeelimination of these cells. He was also funded by Novartis for a Phase II clinical trial of bicalutamide +/- RAD001 in patients with hormone-independent prostatic adenocarcinoma (HIPC) after the first-line androgen deprivation therapy.


National Cancer Survivors Week
May 27-31, 2008

Survivors Picnic, Saturday, May 31, 2008, UC Davis Cancer Center, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Call Patti Robinson at 734-0823 or e-mail patricia.robinson@ucdmc.ucdavis.edu for information.