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UC DAVIS CANCER CENTER EARNS "COMPREHENSIVE" STATUS FROM NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE
Prestigious designation puts cancer center in top tier of cancer centers nationwide

(SACRAMENTO, Calif.) — Nanoparticles that carry drugs directly to tumors, tests that predict whether chemotherapy will be effective before toxic doses of drugs have been administered, radiation aimed at tumors that spares healthy tissue, and culturally sensitive interventions to encourage American Indian women to get regular mammograms and cut their higher-than-average risk of death from breast cancer.

These and other advances in cancer research, care and outreach have earned the UC Davis Cancer Center the world's most prestigious honor in oncology: a "comprehensive" designation from the National Cancer Institute. Its new name, UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center, reflects this designation.

"In practical terms, this means that the people of the Sacramento region and all of inland Northern California have a world-class cancer center at their doorstep and access to a wide array of clinical trials and new drug therapies," said Ralph deVere White, cancer center director. "It means that the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center is in a unique position to break barriers to beat cancer in our community and beyond, and that our patients get care that is as leading-edge and comprehensive as any great cancer center in the nation."

NCI's "comprehensive" designation signifies that the center meets stringent criteria in the areas of laboratory, clinical and population-based research, professional and public education, and in the dissemination of clinical and public advances to the communities it serves. Only 66 cancer centers in the U.S. have been designated by the NCI and of those, only 41, including UC Davis, have earned comprehensive status.

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"This tremendous achievement reflects the extraordinary expertise and dedication of our entire cancer center team," said Claire Pomeroy, vice chancellor of human health sciences and dean of the School of Medicine at UC Davis. "Clearly, the NCI recognizes that our cancer center has one of the most robust and diverse programs in the nation. Designation as a comprehensive cancer center celebrates the great strides our cancer center has made in advancing scientific discovery and improving cancer care outcomes — not just for UC Davis patients, but for everyone facing a cancer diagnosis."

The cancer center was reviewed by a National Cancer Institute review committee last summer. The evaluation was based on a 1,500-page grant proposal that detailed the accomplishments and work under way within each of the cancer center's multidisciplinary research programs, as well as a day-long visit by the entire NCI 25-member committee, which is made up of NCI officials and other NCI cancer center researchers from around the country.

"Because of the depth and breadth of our programs, we were invited to submit an additional application to be considered for comprehensive status," said deVere White. "The NCI has now recognized that our center, although relatively young, has demonstrated its expertise in a broad range of disciplines that contribute to our understanding, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of cancer."

U.S. Rep. Doris Matsui, a long-time supporter of UC Davis Health System's role in advancing medical research and improving health in the Sacramento region, said the cancer center's faculty, staff and leadership should be very proud of their new designation.

"The National Cancer Institute is responsible for making sure that research dollars are flowing into cancer centers that bring the most robust science and technology to the battle against cancer, so that patients here and everywhere can have the best hope for a cure," she said. "UC Davis has proven that it is up to the task, an achievement that will surely benefit everyone in the Sacramento region."

Established in 1991, the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center has quickly grown into a research powerhouse, with more than $108 million in federal research funding. The NCI first designated the center in 2002, renewing its grant for another five years in 2006.

James K. V. Willson, director of the Harold C. Simmons Cancer Center and associate dean of Oncology Programs at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, called the NCI news "a highly deserved recognition of the current and future impact of the center, which is a national resource for cancer discovery and patient care.

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"What makes the UC Davis Cancer Center so unique is the convergence of complementary but different disciplines that have been brought together by visionary leadership and exceptional institutional commitments to create synergies that did not otherwise exist," added Willson, who serves as director of the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center External Board of Advisors.

Over the next five years, the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center will focus on four major areas of research, each of which ties together resources from throughout UC Davis, as well as Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Jackson West Laboratory and others.

One focus area will be comparative oncology, in which veterinary scientists are working with human health scientists to extend the lives of dogs with cancer with treatments and techniques that could benefit human patients, as well.

Another focus area is the development of new technologies to better diagnose and target treatments. Combining forces with the UC Davis Department of Biomedical Engineering, cancer center researchers are finding better ways to pinpoint and plan treatment for breast tumors, distinguish normal from malignant brain tissue during surgery, and improve imaging tools to better identify cancerous cells on positron emission tomography (PET) scans. With Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory scientists, cancer center researchers have found a way to determine whether bladder or lung cancer patients will benefit from chemotherapy by testing microdoses of drugs on tumor samples.

The cancer center continues to build on its robust program of investigator-initiated clinical trials of new therapies, including treatments in their first phase of development. This approach speeds the delivery of new treatments from the laboratories where they are developed to the patients who need them now.

Beyond methods to diagnose disease, develop and deliver treatments, the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center is working on all fronts to close the gaps in cancer outcomes that exist for many populations. UC Davis community-based research and outreach efforts, for example, address disparities among Asian Americans, who are at higher risk for liver cancer; American Indians, who have higher death rates from breast cancer; and young adults and adolescents, who too often fail to adhere to treatment and suffer disproportionately from long-term physical, emotional and social side effects from their cancer experiences.

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"We are delighted to share our vast scientific and clinical resources with the larger community to tackle cancer vigorously and on all fronts," said deVere White. "Ultimately, however, the most important goal at the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center is to improve the care we provide — and the lives of patients in our region and beyond."

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The UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center is the only National Cancer Institute-designated center serving the Central Valley and inland Northern California, a region of more than 6 million people. Its specialists provide compassionate, comprehensive care for more than 9,000 adults and children every year, and access to more than 150 clinical trials at any given time. Its innovative research program engages more than 280 scientists at UC Davis, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Jackson Laboratory (JAX West), whose scientific partnerships advance discovery of new tools to diagnose and treat cancer. Through the Cancer Care Network, UC Davis collaborates with a number of hospitals and clinical centers throughout the Central Valley and Northern California regions to offer the latest cancer care. Its community-based outreach and education programs address disparities in cancer outcomes across diverse populations. For more information, visit cancer.ucdavis.edu.

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