

UCSD Awarded \$3.2 million NIH Training Grant

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Students in the School of Medicine and Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) are poised to be among the leaders of tomorrow in the important area of clinical research studies - turning basic medical research into improved diagnostic techniques and treatment for patients.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) "Pre-doctoral Clinical Research Training Program " has awarded the UCSD School of Medicine \$3.2 million - \$630,000 per year for five years - to support 12 doctoral-level students in both short- and long-term clinical research training.

"Leaders at the NIH realized the need to cultivate and train clinical researchers with skills that match the increasing complexity and needs of the future research enterprise," said Carolyn Kelly, M.D., Associate Dean for Admissions and Student Affairs at UCSD's School of Medicine. "This funding will further UCSD's mission to train a new generation of physicians and pharmacists who can effectively deliver improved patient care because of their broad understanding of the basic research behind new treatments."

The program - which is available to both M.D. and Pharm.D. students - builds upon UCSD's existing Clinical Research Enhancement Through Supplemental Training, or "CREST" program, which provides comprehensive multidisciplinary clinical research training for postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty pursuing a career in clinical or translational research. Both programs are designed to train investigators with specialized clinical and laboratory skills - skills that will enable them to both investigate and develop promising new ways of treating and preventing disease through clinical research.

It will also utilize the curriculum of UCSD's existing Master's of Advanced Studies (MAS) in Clinical Research, as well as resources of the UCSD General Clinical Research Center and the experience garnered by the university's wealth of productive clinical investigators, who have successful track records in mentoring trainees.

"We already have many working physicians who return to the classroom at UCSD for additional clinical research studies through the CREST program," according to Ravindra Mehta, M.D. Mehta, director of UCSD's Clinical Investigation Educational Unit, oversees MAS and CREST . "The new training grant offers the opportunity for medical and pharmacy students to learn these clinical research skills up front, early in their careers. For many students, it will be their initial experience in clinical research. It will perhaps inspire them to become our future clinician-scholars or earn dual Ph.D/M.D. degrees, filling an important need to make the link between basic research and caring for patients."

The NIH program is one of the agency's "ROADMAP" initiatives, an integrated vision developed by the NIH over the past three years. ROADMAP is a plan designed to help American scientists, clinicians, and research institutions stimulate interdisciplinary research teams, and reshape clinical research to accelerate medical discovery and improve human health.

To help fulfill this vision, the NIH held a meeting of national leaders in the field in 2004 to explore ways to expand the pipeline of students entering clinical research. A career in clinical research increasingly requires

the high levels of preparation, training, and commitment similar to a career in laboratory-based research. But until recently, there has been a lack of structured training programs in clinical research across the country. UCSD is one of ten nationwide sites, including Duke University, Johns Hopkins University, Medical University of South Carolina, UC-San Francisco, Ohio State University, the University of Michigan, University of Washington, Washington University and Yale University, to receive awards to enhance or build such training programs.

UCSD students in this program will take part in a range of experiences, including core classroom components that cover the methods of clinical research, such as epidemiology, biostatistics, patient-oriented research, data management, outcomes research and responsible conduct of research. Formal instruction will be accompanied by practical experience through summer or short research experiences, and an intensive clinical research training program. Students will choose the area in which to conduct their research training from a broad array of medical disciplines, ranging from cancer and aging to pharmacology and pharmaceutical science.

"We plan to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for doctoral students who might be interested in clinical research careers. This includes, for example, seminar series, mentoring programs and social interactions designed to help students understand the relationship between basic science research, clinical research, clinical practice and the biotech and pharmaceutical industries," said Kelly.

Kelly will direct the program, assisted by Mehta and Michael Ziegler, M.D., the GCRC's Program Director; David Adler, Pharm.D., Professor of Clinical Pharmacy and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for UCSD's Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences; and Babbi J. Winegarden, Ph.D., Assistant Dean, Educational Development and Evaluation.

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