

## UCSD medical school plans Institute of Aging

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Contact: Kathy Wolff, 452-3714 UCSD MED SCHOOL PLANS INSTITUTE OF AGING

Six million dollars of the funds to be raised during the University of California, San Diego's 25th anniversary campaign have been earmarked for the construction of a 25,000 square-foot research facility for the Institute for Research on Aging (IRA) and the expansion of the La Jolla branch of the popular Seniors Only Comprehensive and Retirement Evaluation (SOCARE) clinic.

The new building will accommodate researchers studying various aspects of aging who are now scattered widely throughout the UCSD campus. The proposed building site is near the Internal Medicine Group, which houses the SOCARE clinic on the School of Medicine campus.

The new research facility will not only enhance opportunities for collaboration and exchange of ideas among researchers—including visiting researchers from all over the world—it will also provide more space for the expansion of existing research programs and the introduction of new ones, according to J. E. Seegmiller, M.D., professor of medicine and director of the IRA.

Research at the Institute focuses on the fundamental mechanisms involved in the aging process as well as on the chronic diseases that commonly affect the elderly.

"We are convinced that disease and disability need not be an inevitable part of growing old," says Seegmiller. "Research may provide the solutions to many of the health problems associated with aging."

"A major objective of the IRA is to identify the factors most responsible for successful aging, that is, the preservation of independence, activity and health into the later years," he says.

A priority at the IRA is finding ways to treat and prevent senile dementia. Most important of these is Alzheimer's disease, which causes memory loss and progressive mental deterioration in an estimated two million individuals and contributes to the institutionalization of as many as half of the elderly people requiring placement in long-term care facilities in this country.

The UCSD Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, established in 1984 as one of five such centers in the country by the National Institute of Aging, will be housed in the new facility.

Another focus of research is the seeming disparity between many individuals' chronological age and their biological age. Certain changes in body composition and function that occur over time, called "bio-markers," may provide scientists with insight into this phenomenon, according to Seegmiller.

Researchers at the IRA are also probing the causes of other problems that occur with age, including changes in the way the body handles drugs, the development of cardiovascular disease, deterioration of the immune system, the development of arthritis, the loss of bone minerals, changes in the vascular system and the development of glaucoma.

"Such research is important because if, in the next decades, science does not make major strides in treating and preventing the most common diseases that plague the elderly, then vigorous and healthy old age will elude many of us," says Seegmiller.

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