

Moores UCSD Cancer Center Awarded Grant to Plan Public-Private Drug Development Center

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The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has awarded a one-year planning grant to the Rebecca and John Moores UCSD Cancer Center to study the feasibility of creating a novel public-private center to speed the process and reduce the cost of developing new drugs and diagnostic techniques for cancer patients. The Cancer Center was one of only 14 planning grant recipients nationwide.

This new initiative by the NCI, called the Academic Public-Private Partnership Program (AP4), is designed to bring together the basic research skills of academic and nonprofit groups, the scientific and marketing expertise of industry, the resources and interests of disease-oriented charities, and the administrative support, resources and discovery and development expertise of the NCI. The goal is to speed the transition of potential new therapies from the laboratory into the clinic.

"This represents a bold new concept designed to accelerate the development of cancer drugs and other intervention strategies," said the Cancer Center's Stephen Howell, M.D., professor of medicine and principal investigator on the planning grant. "Today it costs more than \$800 million and takes 10 to 15 years to get a new drug to market. It is imperative that we find new ways to shorten the time and reduce the costs involved in bringing discoveries to patients."

During the planning year, potential industrial partners will meet with academic investigators and administrators to explore opportunities, discuss how intellectual property issues will be handled, and establish a research plan. At the end of that period, the NCI will select approximately six of the planning grant awardees to receive full funding for a new center focused on rapid development of new prevention, diagnostic, imaging or drug interventions for cancer. The centers will be formed from partnerships among academia, industry, non-profit institutions and government entities.

To merit full NCI funding of \$450,000 to \$600,000 per year the AP4 Center at UCSD must attract a total of \$300,000 to \$450,000 in membership contributions from industrial or non-profit partners per year.

"The novelty of AP4 is that the companies, not the academics, will have a major role in determining the AP4 Center's projects. This is attractive to industry," said Howell, who is a member of the Cancer Center's Industrial Advisory Board.

Representatives from the member companies will form the AP4 Center's Steering Committee that will have the authority to initiate and terminate projects and ensure they adhere to industrial standards and time lines.

"We're enormously excited about being part of this initiative that charts a new course for improving the efficiency with which new cancer drugs are developed," said Howell.

He noted that efficient functioning of the interface between academia and industry is very important to making new cancer therapies available to patients, and that the AP4 model addresses some of the challenges that companies face when trying to work closely with academics.

Howell is also spearheading a related initiative of the Moores UCSD Cancer Center. The Center's Biomedical/Pharmaceutical Partnership Program (BP3) is designed to connect Cancer Center researchers with companies that may have an interest in their work.

The BP3 Program and the AP4 planning grant are part of a major new focus of the Cancer Center, under the leadership of its director, Dennis Carson, M.D. His goal is to forge strong working relationships with biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies to bring new options to patients quickly and at less cost. Both Carson and Howell have founded their own companies, and have substantial experience in working with industry and with the challenges involved in bringing new therapies to market.

Founded in 1979, the Rebecca and John Moores UCSD Cancer Center is one of just 38 centers in the United States to hold a National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation as a Comprehensive Cancer Center. As such, it ranks among the top centers in the nation conducting basic and clinical cancer research, providing advanced patient care and serving the community through outreach and education programs. Media Contacts: Nancy Stringer (858) 534-6163