UC San Diego Health

UCSD Research Center to Host Second Scientific Symposium on Celiac Disease

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Prize for Excellence in Celiac Disease Research to be Presented in Conjunction with Symposium

Celiac disease, a digestive condition triggered by consumption of a common protein called gluten, will be the focus of a one-day scientific symposium at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine on Friday, March 16. The William K. Warren Medical Research Center for Celiac Disease at UCSD will host "Celiac Disease: New Insights in Diagnosis, Pathogenesis and Therapy" from 12 noon to 4:30 p.m., with registration at 11:30 a.m. at UCSD's Center for Molecular Genetics conference room.

The first-ever William Warren, Jr. Prize for Excellence in Celiac Disease Research, with a prize of $25,0000 – funded by the Oklahoma-based William K. Warren Foundation – will be awarded to Ludvig Sollid, M.D., Ph.D., professor at the Immunology Institute at the University of Oslo in Norway. Sollid, who was nominated for the award by Nobel Laureate Rolf Zinkernagel, was selected by a national panel from among ten world-class scientists nominated for the prize.

Sollid is among a stellar list of speakers for the event, which also includes Frits Koning, Ph.D., Professor of Immunology at Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands; Alaa Rostom, M.D., associate professor of medicine and community health science at the University of Calgary in Canada; Chaitan Khosla, Ph.D., professor of chemistry, clinical engineering and biochemistry at Stanford University; and Martin F. Kagnoff, M.D., professor of medicine and pediatrics at UCSD and director of the William K. Warren Medical Research Center for Celiac Disease

Celiac disease is triggered by consumption of a common protein called gluten, which is found in bread, pasta, cookies, pizza crust and many other foods. Estimated to affect one in 100 Americans, it is a disease that often goes undiagnosed. The disease causes different problems at different stages, but symptoms may include abdominal pain, nausea, lack of appetite, anemia or skin rash, among others. In infants, it can result in a failure to grow and gain weight. Currently, the only treatment for celiac disease is a change in diet.

"This is a small intestinal disease that involves key genetic, environmental and immunologic factors," said Kagnoff. "Celiac disease is activated when a genetically susceptible individual ingests 'gluten' proteins present in grains such as wheat, rye and barley."

Sollid's research at the University of Oslo demonstrated that in order for a person to develop Celiac Disease, he or she must have inherited specific genes from either or both parents. He and his colleagues defined the mechanism and structural basis by which specific molecules contribute to the disease. Sollid's essential new insights into the pathogenesis of Celiac Disease underlie several new therapies currently being explored for Celiac Disease.

UCSD's Research Center and the symposium are funded by a $2.5 million gift from the William K. Warren Foundation, announced in December 2005. Research investigators at the center include Kagnoff, a widely recognized expert in the field of celiac disease; Michael Karin, Ph.D., UCSD School of Medicine professor of Pharmacology, widely recognized for his studies on the signaling and regulation of inflammation; and Hilde Cheroute, Ph.D., UCSD associate adjunct professor of medicine, a world authority in the immunology of the small intestine.

Researchers or physicians and nutritionists looking for more information or to register for the scientific symposium on March 16 can go to http://health.ucsd.edu/celiac or e-mail celiaccenter@ucsd.edu

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