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UC San Diego Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Janssen R&D Collaborate to Treat Chagas Disease

Team will seek new therapeutic targets and treatments for this neglected tropical disease

Researchers at the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of California, San Diego have entered into a research collaboration with Janssen Research & Development, LLC (Janssen R&D), one of the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson, to identify new therapeutic targets for Chagas disease, a parasitic infection that is the leading cause of heart failure in Latin America.



Trypanosoma cruzi, the parasite that causes Chagas disease.

As part of this collaboration, Janssen R&D will provide James McKerrow, MD, PhD, dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy, and his research team with funding and access to its “Jump-Starter” screening library of compounds. Access to this library will help McKerrow and team identify chemical probes for studying Chagas disease and aid the discovery of compounds for potentially treating it.

“Chagas disease is known as a ‘neglected tropical disease’ because of the lack of resources and attention dedicated to studying, preventing and treating it, especially considering the millions of people it affects,” McKerrow said. “We’re excited by Janssen R&D’s commitment to global public health, particularly for underserved populations, and this opportunity to work with them to take the ‘neglect’ out of this neglected tropical disease. This collaboration represents an important step forward in establishing a culture of industry-academic training and research at UC San Diego.”

McKerrow and his research team will use a new robotic drug screening facility in the Skaggs School of Pharmacy to test the thousands of Janssen R&D compounds for their ability to kill or inhibit *Trypanosoma cruzi*, the parasite that causes Chagas disease.

“Through our long-standing legacy of commitment and partnership to improve global public health, we aspire to make a lasting difference in human health by addressing comprehensive health needs and delivering meaningful and enduring impact for individuals, families and communities worldwide,” said Wim Parys, MD, head of Global Public Health R&D at Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson. “By collaborating with Dr. McKerrow and the Skaggs School of Pharmacy at UC San Diego, we hope to help eliminate Chagas disease in the near future and improve the lives of millions who suffer from it.”

According to the World Health Organization, Chagas affects 6 to 7 million people worldwide and is curable if treatment is initiated soon after infection. The disease is endemic in Latin America and is an emerging infection in many other regions of the world, including California.

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