

UCSD School of Medicine Program Reaches Out to New Hispanic Health Professionals

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Award to support six-month training internships for research in HIV/AIDS in the U.S./Mexico border region

The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine has launched a new program to train a select group of promising young Hispanic public health and biomedical research experts, who will work with health professionals at UCSD and in Mexico to explore new strategies for addressing the critical challenge of HIV/AIDS and related infectious diseases in border communities.

Funding to support the program has been awarded to UCSD's Division of International Health and Cross-Cultural Medicine, under the direction of division chief Steffanie Strathdee, Ph.D., by the U.S. Office of Minority Health (OMH) and the Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools (HSHPS). The program will support four six-month internships which will be awarded to Hispanic graduate students who are interested in research experiences in HIV/AIDS and related infections and substance use with Latino populations in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The fellowships are for individuals who are U.S. citizens or have work eligibility status.

"The HIV/AIDS epidemic is now a major health problem for both the U.S. and Mexico – particularly in our shared border region. Our goal is to train the next generation of Hispanic public health and biomedical researchers who have expertise in substance abuse and its consequences in terms of infectious diseases," said Strathdee. "Our program is poised to make an important contribution towards training Hispanic professionals who can effectively address this critical bi-national problem."

"UCSD's cross border HIV/AIDS training program will allow these interns to have on-going opportunities to learn from and partner with Mexican academicians and health professionals," said Maria Luisa Zúñiga, Ph.D., the training program's co-director and assistant professor in UCSD's Division of International Health and Cross-Cultural Medicine. Together, Strathdee and Zúñiga will select four individuals who are either current students or within one year of graduation from a Masters or doctoral-level program in medicine, public health or biomedical science.

In addition to HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections are serious consequences related to substance abuse, and are problems encountered with increasing frequency in our border communities, according to Strathdee. The UCSD School of Medicine has major programs in place for research and treatment in HIV/AIDS and related infections. These include:

- → The “Framework Programs in Global Health” program, a partnership with the San Diego State University (SDSU) Graduate School of Public Health. This program was recently funded by the Fogarty International Center to offer a global health research and training program that will focus on the U.S./Mexico border region.
- → Prevention programs to combat HIV/AIDS and related infections such as tuberculosis among injection drug users, partnering UCSD with researchers on both sides of the border, and with hospitals as well as local and federal health agencies in Mexico.
- → An established research program partnering Strathdee’s team with universities on both sides of the border, as well as with the Tijuana Municipal Health Service and local, non-governmental organizations in Tijuana.
- → The USAID-sponsored cross-border HIV prevention training program, funded with approximately \$500,000 over three years through a USAID U.S.-Mexico Training, Internships, Exchanges and Scholarships (TIES) grant. A joint program between UCSD, SDSU and two universities in Mexico, its objectives are to strengthen the capacity of Mexican public health practitioners, outreach workers and policy makers to prevent and manage HIV/AIDS; to translate ongoing research into policy and practice; and to facilitate training and support degree programs for Mexicans interested in careers in HIV/AIDS research or public health.

The latest funding from HSHPS will provide monthly stipends to the selected participants throughout the six-month training program. The Hispanic interns will be paired with a UCSD mentor to develop a research project that will include, at minimum, weekly field visits to Tijuana along with workshops, seminars and lectures. These fellows will also have an opportunity to interact with Mexican students who are funded through the USAID program.

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