

## UC San Diego-Led Research Team Receives \$6 Million Award From Fondation Leducq for Five-Year Cardiovascular Disease Study

*The Fondation Leducq's Transatlantic Networks of Excellence Program will support research by a global consortium of scientists headed by UCSD as they investigate "Immune Modulation of Cardiovascular Disease"*

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Judy Piercey

A \$6 million grant from the Fondation Leducq will help researchers at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine direct an innovative global network of scientists in the study of cardiovascular disease. The consortium's proposal, *"Immune Modulation of Cardiovascular Disease,"* was selected to receive the award through the Fondation's Transatlantic Networks of Excellence Program. Fondation Leducq, a Paris-based nonprofit institution, is dedicated to improving human health through international efforts to combat cardiovascular disease.

The American coordinator for the five-year study is Joseph Witztum, M.D., professor of Medicine at UC San Diego's Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism. The investigation will focus on the development of novel ways to help prevent atherosclerosis, the build up of cholesterol within the walls of arteries, which is the leading cause of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases that cause heart attacks and strokes. Research has recently focused on the role of inflammation, and the immune system, in this process. Network investigators are setting out to characterize this role, and to investigate highly novel treatments developed in light of the knowledge gained about immune disease, such as vaccines to prevent atherosclerosis.

The recent UCSD award is one of only four grants funded under the Fondation Leducq's 2005-2006 Transatlantic Networks of Excellence Program. Each research network will receive \$6 million over five years to support a collaborative research program involving European and North American investigators. In addition to Witztum, other scientists involved in the study include:

**European Coordinator:** Seppo Ylä-Herttuala, University of Kuopio, Finland

**Core Members:** Inder Verma, The Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla (California) Christopher Glass, University of California, San Diego Alain Tedgui, Hôpital Lariboisière, Paris Bernd Binder, Medical University of Vienna, Austria

**Associate Members:** Godfrey Getz, University of Chicago John Chapman, Groupe Hospitalier Pitié-Salpêtrière, Paris

"This generous grant from the Fondation Leducq will provide UC San Diego the opportunity to lead an unparalleled multidisciplinary and multinational opportunity to investigate the role of the immune system in cardiovascular disease," said Witztum. "As our team of internationally recognized scientists study new treatments to prevent atherosclerosis, the global impact of this collaboration could some day lead to novel therapies to help prevent heart attacks or strokes in millions of individuals each year."

The UCSD consortium of researchers brings together investigators who are internationally recognized for their studies defining the roles of adaptive and innate immunity in both animal models and clinical studies in humans. There is also a history of strong collaborations among the participants. Witztum and Ylä-Herttuala together helped to define the role of oxidized LDL in atherosclerosis, as well as the immune response in the formation of lipid deposits in the arteries. Ylä-Herttuala and Verma have both conducted pioneering gene transfer work in cardiovascular disease. UCSD's Glass has published seminal research related to the role of macrophages in heart disease, including research with Witztum.

The Fondation Leducq grant contributes to the \$1 billion fundraising goal of The Campaign for UCSD: *Imagine What's Next*.

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