

UC San Diego Led Research Consortium Awarded \$10 Million Renewal Grant

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U *CSD Researcher Leads Schizophrenia Genetics Consortium*

The six-site Consortium on the Genetics of Schizophrenia (COGS), led by the director of the Schizophrenia Program at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, has received a \$10 million renewal grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), one of the National Institutes of Health. The grant funds an ongoing, multiple-site collaboration examining the genetic architecture of the causes and abnormalities related to schizophrenia.



David Braff, MD

David Braff, MD, professor of psychiatry and director of the Schizophrenia Program at UCSD School of Medicine, will continue his role of director for COGS, and also serve as the principal investigator, overseeing the efforts of six academic research centers around the country. The project, which will span nearly 12 years when completed, aims to learn more about the specific heritable neurophysiological and neurocognitive deficits – called “endophenotypes” – and related genetic abnormalities in schizophrenia patients and their family members.

“Instead of directly exploring the genetics of the diagnostic entity of schizophrenia, we are identifying the genetics of brain-based deficits that occur in schizophrenia patients and their family members,” Braff said. “By exploring these endophenotypes and understanding their genomic causes and resulting brain abnormalities, COGS has great potential to contribute to the development of new genetically informed targets for medication and psychosocial treatment, more effectively treating and even preventing the onset of schizophrenia.”

A common but complex clinical brain disorder, schizophrenia affects one percent of the world’s population and is a severe, chronic and generally disabling brain disease. Schizophrenia is a psychosis that contorts and disrupts normal thoughts, speech and behavior.

“Schizophrenia is one of the leading medical causes of disability,” Braff said. “It often strikes early in life and lasts a long time. It is thus one of the world’s biggest public health problems and challenges.”

Originally launched in April 2003, COGS was first funded by NIMH from 2003 to 2008. By May 2008, more than 2,000 patients and family member participants had been seen by investigators and added to an extensive NIH and COGS database.

“COGS’ collected data is a unique and accessible national resource for current and future studies of the neurobehavioral and genetic architecture of schizophrenia. Its methods of genetic analysis can be applied to many other heritable disorders, such as hypertension and diabetes, which have similar genomic structures,” Braff said.

Collectively, the six sites that compose COGS will receive more than \$10 million in funding over the next four years to continue this work. COGS has also been awarded large grants to work on other important genetic questions, such as the Copy Number Variants (CNVs) study, led by breast cancer genetics pioneer Mary-Claire King, PhD, of the University of Washington, and Andrew Feinberg, MD, MPH, of Johns Hopkins University, who is a world leader in how environmental events lead to “epigenetic” changes to the genome.

COGS investigators at UC San Diego include COGS deputy director Neal R. Swerdlow, MD, PhD, Tiffany Greenwood, PhD, Gregory Light, PhD, and Ming Tsuang, MD, PhD. The other institutions joining UC San Diego in COGS are Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Stanford University, UC Los Angeles, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Washington.

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