

September 6, 2006 UC San Diego Biologist Named Distinguished Young Scholar in Medical Research by W.M. Keck Foundation

Amy Pasquinelli's Research Laboratory Investigates a Specialized Type of MicroRNA That May Function as a Tumor Suppressor

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Judy Piercey

Amy Pasquinelli, an assistant professor of biology at the University of California, San Diego, has been named one of five Distinguished Young Scholars in Medical Research by the W.M. Keck Foundation, a leading supporter of high-impact medical research, science and engineering. This award comes with a \$1 million, five-year research grant, which contributes to the \$1 billion fundraising goal of The Campaign for UCSD: *Imagine What's Next*.

Pasquinelli's research laboratory investigates a specialized type of microRNA that may function as a tumor suppressor. Her research may contribute to developing microRNAs as less-toxic, targeted new therapies against cancer and other diseases.

"Private support is invaluable to UCSD's outstanding young faculty to pursue innovative ideas and pioneer groundbreaking research," said Marye Anne Fox, UCSD chancellor. "We are grateful to the W.M. Keck Foundation for their commitment to supporting the nation's most promising young researchers, and look forward to Dr. Pasquinelli's future work."

"I am incredibly thankful for this support from the Keck Foundation, which allows me to pursue creative and ambitious research projects in ways that would not be possible through traditional grants," said Pasquinelli. "The prestige associated with this grant is very motivating because it means that my research goals were deemed worthy of funding by an exceptional panel of established scientists."

The Keck Distinguished Young Scholars in Medical Research program was designed to support groundbreaking research addressing the fundamental mechanisms of human disease. Under the program, each grant recipient's sponsoring institution receives an award of as much as \$1 million to support the scientist's research activities for a period of five years.

It is the foundation's hope that the investment in the Keck Scholars will greatly benefit society for generations to come with continued advances in understanding - and combating - the fundamental mechanisms of human disease.

Each applicant was nominated by his or her academic institution and then evaluated individually by the Foundation's Medical Research staff and a scientific advisory committee of outside scientific experts. The program finalists were unanimously approved by the Foundation's Board of Directors.

According to Pasquinelli, "Government funded grants usually require extensive preliminary work proving feasibility. For a young investigator, it is particularly challenging to meet these requirements while setting up a new lab. Funding from private foundations can provide the seed money for a young investigator to prove the

feasibility of new ideas and approaches, which then can become the preliminary data needed for larger scale federal grants."

Pasquinelli received her Ph.D. in biomolecular chemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was a Helen Hay Whitney Postdoctoral Fellow in the genetics department at the Harvard Medical School. Since joining the UCSD faculty in 2003, she has also been named a Searle Scholar, a V Foundation for Cancer Research Scholar and a Rosalind Franklin Young Investigator.

Media Contact: Judy Piercey, (858) 534-6128

