

UCSD Medical Center Participates in \$37 Million National Study

Most Comprehensive Study of COPD Ever Attempted

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The Clinical Trials Center (CTC) at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Medical Center is one of only 16 clinical study centers nationwide selected to participate in the most comprehensive study of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) ever undertaken. COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States.

The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) awarded a \$37 million grant to National Jewish Medical and Research Center and Brigham and Women's Hospital to lead this multi-center clinical trial to identify the genetic, epidemiological and radiological characteristics of COPD. The long-term goal of the study is a better understanding the disease and finding more effective treatments.

"This study will help us determine why some smokers get COPD and others do not. We want to understand the specific genetic factors that protect a particular smoker or make someone else more susceptible," said Joe Ramsdell, M.D., director, Division of General Internal Medicine-Geriatrics and professor of clinical medicine at the UC San Diego School of Medicine. "Our goal is to act early to stop the progress of COPD. We look forward to a day when medical teams are no longer cleaning up the damage caused by COPD but intervening early enough to initiate individualized therapy."

COPD is an umbrella term for a variety of progressive lung diseases, most commonly emphysema and chronic bronchitis, which damage lung tissue and make it difficult to breathe. Cigarette smoking causes the majority of COPD cases, but inhaling other kinds of lung irritants, such as chemical fumes, dust, or air pollution, may also cause the disease.

"We are particularly interested in enrolling Hispanic and African-American smokers in the study," said Paul Ferguson, Executive Director of the Clinical Trials Center at UCSD Medical Center. "These groups have been underrepresented in previous studies and we know there are differences between ethnic groups in response to medication and the disease process itself."

Researchers with the UCSD CTC will enroll two to three hundred participants each year for five years. (The 16 centers together will enroll a total of 10,500 participants.) The study requires smokers with and without COPD. Participants with COPD will donate a sample of blood for DNA analysis and undergo a single study visit that includes pulmonary function tests, questionnaires about respiratory and general health, a six-minute walk test, a physical examination and a chest CT scan. Subsequent phone and mail contacts will be conducted with study participants every six months.

COPD is the only leading cause of death in the US that has been steadily increasing in frequency over the past decade. There is no treatment that can cure the disease and there are few measures that exist to extend the lives of patients.

The main symptoms are: a long-lasting (chronic) cough, mucus that comes up when you cough and shortness of breath that gets worse when you exercise.

As COPD gets worse, patients may be short of breath even when doing simple tasks, like getting dressed or fixing a meal. It gets harder to eat or exercise, and breathing takes much more energy. People often lose weight and get weaker. At times, symptoms may suddenly flare up and get much worse. This is called a COPD exacerbation. An exacerbation can range from mild to life-threatening. The longer a patient has COPD, the more severe these flare-ups will be.

The UC San Diego Medical Center Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine provides diagnosis and treatment services for patients with acute and chronic lung diseases. In 2007, UCSD Medical Center was ranked  [8th in the nation](#) for the treatment of respiratory diseases by *U.S. News & World Report*.

The NHLBI is promoting better awareness of COPD through its public education campaign, Learn More Breathe Better. For more information, visit: www.learnaboutcopd.org ↗.

For more information, call 888-UCSD-AIR.

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