

UC San Diego

# UC San Diego News Center

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By Kristin Schafgans

Nov 16, 2017



*UC San Diego School of Medicine. Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications*

## **Pioneering Physiologist Establishes Endowed Chair at UC San Diego School of Medicine**

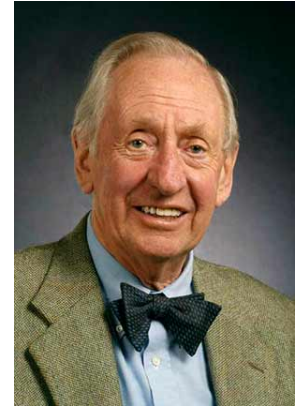
**\$2 million gift from Professor Emeritus John B. West will support teaching and research in respiratory physiology**

Physiologist John B. West, M.D., Ph.D., can claim many firsts during his career at the University of California San Diego. He was one of the first faculty members hired at the School of Medicine, in 1969. He was the first to take physiological measurements at the summit of Mt. Everest—a dataset that has yet to be replicated. He wrote the textbook, now in its 10th edition, used to teach respiratory physiology to medical students around the world. And he was one of the first to study the effects of gravity on the lung, collaborating with NASA on studies of astronauts in space. To continue his legacy

and ensure future support for research and teaching in his field, West has made a \$2 million gift to establish the John B. West Endowed Chair in Respiratory Physiology, the campus's first endowed faculty chair in Respiratory Physiology. His gift contributes to the [Campaign for UC San Diego](#).

The endowed chair will provide support for a faculty member in the Division of Physiology at the UC San Diego School of Medicine. Funded through philanthropic gifts, endowed chairs are an important tool for recruiting and retaining outstanding scholars. They provide a dedicated source of funds, in perpetuity, to support the research, teaching and service activities of the chair holder.

“John has always been a pioneer,” said David A. Brenner, MD, vice chancellor for Health Sciences and dean of the UC San Diego School of Medicine. “He helped build this campus and its curriculum from virtually day one. He has long been at the forefront of his science and discipline. This gift is his way of continuing to ensure that the standards of excellence he has set in teaching and research continue at UC San Diego. Endowed chairs help us attract the very best physicians and scholars, men and women like John who expand our knowledge of human health and disease. We are truly grateful for his service and support.”



*Professor Emeritus John B. West*

West says his gift is one of thanks, too.

“I’m very grateful to UC San Diego. Had I stayed in London, where I worked before coming to UC San Diego, I am sure I would not have had the same opportunities. Respiratory physiology is the foundation for the intelligent practice of pulmonary medicine, and it’s a pleasure to be able to endow a chair to continue to support this important field.”

West was born in Adelaide, Australia and attended medical school there, specializing in the nascent field of pulmonology—the study of the respiratory system—which experienced a surge in interest following World War II. While working at the Hammersmith Hospital in London, West joined Sir Edmund Hillary’s 1961 scientific expedition to the Himalayas. The team camped at 19,000 feet for several months to study how people living at sea level acclimate to high elevation. The experience planted the seed for a later expedition that West led in 1981. This time, West and his team set out to take the first measurements of human physiology at the summit of Mr. Everest, the highest point in the world. Today, they remain the only physiological measurements taken at the summit.

In addition to high altitude studies, West became interested in studying the effects of gravity on the lung. He received his first grant from NASA in 1969 to investigate how space travel impacts the respiratory function of astronauts. It was the start of more than 30 years of collaboration with NASA, including work on several SpaceLab missions.

Like his work in the Himalayas and with astronauts, West was drawn to the UC San Diego School of Medicine for the unusual opportunity it presented. The school was looking for someone at the interface of physiology and clinical medicine—someone who could teach physiology out of the clinical side—which was a markedly different approach for the time. West taught the first class of medical students and wrote the definitive textbook for his field: “Respiratory Physiology: The Essentials.” His book, as well as his YouTube lectures, continues to be used by medical students around the world.

As part of the Campaign for UC San Diego, gifts of all sizes from UC San Diego faculty and staff are helping to enhance the student experience, enrich the campus community and spark new discoveries and innovations. The Faculty and Staff Giving program brings together employees across campus to support UC San Diego and continue the nontradition. To learn more, visit [campaign.ucsd.edu/faculty-staff](https://campaign.ucsd.edu/faculty-staff).

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