

October 06, 2020 | By Heather Buschman, PhD

## J. Silvio Gutkind, PhD, Named Chair of the Department of Pharmacology

J. Silvio Gutkind, PhD, has been named chair of the Department of Pharmacology at University of California San Diego School of Medicine.

“Silvio is an exceptional leader, and he has an extraordinary ability to build collaborations, wide-ranging intellectual insights and seemingly limitless energy,” said Steven Garfin, MD, interim dean of UC San Diego School of Medicine. “I’m thrilled to support him in his new role.”

Gutkind joined the UC San Diego School of Medicine faculty in 2015 and has served as Distinguished Professor in the Department of Pharmacology, as well as associate director of basic science and co-director of the Head and Neck Cancer Center at Moores Cancer Center. Before moving to UC San Diego, Gutkind spent nearly 30 years at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), most recently as chief of the Oral and Pharyngeal Cancer Branch, and chief of the Cell Growth Regulation and Molecular Carcinogenesis Sections at the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.

“I am honored to be taking on this new leadership position and so happy to play a new role as part of our amazing department,” Gutkind said. “I plan to work tirelessly with the team to increase the recognition of pharmacology as the discipline that can harness the full potential of the current revolution in precision medicine.”

If you think of precision medicine as the right drug, hitting the right molecular target, in the right patient, at the right dose, at the right time, Gutkind said, then pharmacology is the business of finding that right drug and right target.



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Gutkind's own research team uses genomics, proteomics and system biology approaches to study the cellular communication networks that promote cancer growth, with emphasis on head and neck cancers and uveal melanoma. They are especially interested in the roles of molecules such as G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs) and mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), and they are developing innovative anti-cancer prevention and treatment options that work by targeting these molecules. Gutkind has led a multi-institutional clinical trial establishing the benefits of treating oral cancer patients with mTOR inhibitors, and is co-leading a new mTOR-targeting chemoprevention medicine trial in oral pre-malignancy.

The UC San Diego School of Medicine Department of Pharmacology is home to more than 25 faculty members and consistently ranks among the top three NIH-funded pharmacology departments in the U.S. Research areas of particular strength include cell signaling, GPCRs, cancer biology, structural and computational biology and environmental toxicology. One of Gutkind's main goals is to enhance collaborations between the department's outstanding basic scientists and clinicians at UC San Diego Health and Moores Cancer Center.

"Together, we will develop and expand our pharmacology program and continue to grow in our individual and collective efforts, continuing to make breakthrough discoveries — our engine! — and to build on the strength of each of our basic and clinical departments to translate our discoveries for the benefit of patients," Gutkind said.

Gutkind grew up in a semi-rural area on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina, as the son of the town's only pharmacist and full-time health professional. He credits his father's devotion to compassionate, equitable patient care as the driving force behind his career choices and commitment to establishing a diverse and inclusive research environment.

He earned Masters of Science degrees and a PhD in Pharmacy and Biochemistry from the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and received postdoctoral training at the National Institute of Mental Health and National Cancer Institute at the NIH.

Gutkind was elected to the National Academy of Medicine and elected chair of the Division of Molecular Pharmacology for the American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET). He has published more than 500 research articles in some of the most prestigious journals, including *Cell*, *Nature*, *Science*, *Science Translational Medicine*, *Cancer Discovery*, *Cancer Cell* and *Nature Cell Biology*.

He serves on the editorial boards of several scientific journals, including *Science Signaling*, *Molecular Pharmacology* and *Cancer Prevention Research*. He holds or has received funding support from the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial

Research, and he co-leads one of the Cancer Moonshot Research Initiatives. He has supervised and mentored many junior investigators, who are now playing leadership roles in multiple institutions in the U.S. and abroad.

Among Gutkind's many awards and accolades are the International Association of Dental Research's Distinguished Scientist Award, NIH Merit Award, NIH Director's Award and Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America's Research & Hope Award for Excellence in Academic Research, for his seminal work on GPCR function in cancer.

Gutkind succeeds Joan Heller Brown, PhD, who served as chair of the Department of Pharmacology for 18 years. The department originated in 1987, with founding chair Palmer Taylor, PhD.

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