San Diego Stem Cell Consortium Tops in State Funding

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The San Diego Consortium for Regenerative Medicine (SDCRM) leads California in grants and funding following the approval of Comprehensive Research Grants by the state's stem cell agency.

Since late last year, the consortium of UC San Diego, Burnham Institute for Medical Research, Salk Institute for Biological Studies and The Scripps Research Institute has received 29 grants totaling $37,336,063 to conduct life-saving work in human embryonic stem cell research. SDCRM, established in March 2006 as a nonprofit entity, marshals the intellectual resources of four world leaders in life sciences research, bringing scientists from each institution together to conduct joint research and training programs in stem cell research. In the most recent funding round announced Friday, the SDCRM institutes received six grants totaling $16,479,588.

"Our collaborative research at the Consortium will provide the foundation for discoveries offering promise to those suffering from diseases that are currently incurable," said Dr. Edward Holmes, president and CEO of SDCRM and former vice chancellor of Health Sciences at UC San Diego. "The state of California has recognized the extraordinary potential of the San Diego Consortium for Regenerative Medicine by continuing to provide robust support for our efforts."

The latest funding for SDCRM researchers includes two grants received by Burnham Institute. Neurosciences Professor Stuart Lipton will receive $3,035,996 to use human embryonic stem cells to develop a supply of nerve cells for brain repair. Professor Mark Mercola will receive $3,036,002 to develop drug-like molecules that stimulate generation of heart muscle cells from human embryonic stem cells.

UC San Diego scientists received three grants. Larry Goldstein, director of the UC San Diego's Stem Cell Program, will receive $2,512,644 over four years for his work on using human embryonic stem cells to generate human neuronal models of hereditary Alzheimer's disease to help find causes and treatments for the devastating neurological illness. Martin Marsala, UC San Diego professor of anesthesiology at UCSD's School of Medicine, will receive $2,445,716 for using human embryonic stem cells to help treat certain spinal injuries, which may eventually allow improved motor function. UC San Diego biological sciences researcher Yang Xu will receive $2,570,000 for work to promote stable self-renewal of human embryonic stem cells in order to improve scientists' capability to general disease-specific human stem cell lines.

At The Salk Institute, Professor Fred Gage will receive $2,879,210 to develop procedures to induce human embryonic stem cells into mature functioning neurons that carry genes that cause debilitating human neurological diseases. In initial phases of state funding, The Scripps Research Institute received two grants totaling $1,836,280.

SDCRM created its super-partnership to launch new, unprecedented collaborations that will accelerate the development of cures and therapies for some of humanity's most devastating diseases, including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases. The consortium also will expand research and academic efforts in developmental biology, bioinformatics, regenerative medicine ethics, student training and other disciplines.

"Of all the California research teams funded by Prop. 71 dollars, only the SDCRM offers a partnership of preeminent nonprofit research institutions," Holmes said. "With these four renowned institutions working together, we can provide a synergy of scientific collaboration that's not possible at individual institutions."

Funding is from Proposition 71, the Stem Cell Research and Cures Act, which California voters approved in 2004 to provide $3 billion in stem cell research. Grants are approved by the 29-member Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC), governing board of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM).

In the first round of funding, SDCRM received $13.4 million to support 19 research projects. The initial funds are known as the Leon Thal SEED grants, named for the renowned UCSD Alzheimer's researcher who died in February.

Media Contact: Stacie Spector, 858-534-0363

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Burnham Institute for Medical Research

Salk Institute for Biological Studies

The Scripps Research Institute