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\$55M NIH Grant Advances Clinical and Translational Research at UC San Diego

Federal funding will fuel new innovations combining basic science and clinical care; brings total support to \$140 million since institute opened in 2010

The Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute (ACTRI) at University of California San Diego has received a five-year, \$54.7 million Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) from the National Center for Advancing Translational Science (NCATS), part of the National Institutes of Health. The new grant is the third such award since ACTRI opened in 2010, bringing total funding support to approximately \$144 million.

“The first CTSA laid the foundation for transforming our institution. It built the early infrastructure that would help change the way we thought about moving discoveries from the lab to the clinic,” said Gary S. Firestein, MD, founding director of ACTRI and dean and associate vice chancellor of clinical and translational research at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

“The second CTSA focused on making ACTRI the hub for clinical research and clinical trials at UC San Diego.”

The latest CTSA, said Firestein, will refine the fundamental work of the past decade and provide new resources that will launch a new wave of discovery and transformation.

“The next five years will be about bringing together basic scientists, engineers and clinicians to create a pipeline of innovation. This effort builds on our [Tricorder XPRIZE competition](#) and will bring together multidisciplinary teams of clinicians and scientists.”



The Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute has received \$144 million in National Institutes of Health funding since 2010. The ACTRI building, which opened in 2016, houses nearly 1,000 researchers and staff.

The new funding will also be used to continue a scholar program supporting young faculty members establishing careers, expand ACTRI's "Game Center," a program that uses virtual reality games to train investigators in team science and create new mentoring programs in grant-writing, the financial lifeblood of research.

New efforts include the Dissemination & Implementation Science Center, which will help investigators move their ideas into the community and a new Team Science Core. Mobile apps will be developed to help integrate clinical trials and the electronic health record, improving safety for research participants.

The Center for Life Course and Vulnerable Population Research will expand to engage communities and ensure vulnerable and underserved populations are part of the research and clinical enterprise. The Center for Clinical Research will provide dedicated project managers, ethics support and clinical research infrastructure. Two new centers will be launched: the Device Acceleration Center and Center for Excellence in Immunogenomics, both intended to bring scientists and clinicians together in teams to address unmet medical needs, specifically in the science and medicine of immunity.

"Science and medicine often operate in parallel universes," said Firestein. "We've taken steps to bring them together, but we want to go farther in integrating research and clinical care. For example, combining data from clinical trials with health records would benefit researchers, but even more so trial participants and patients. It would make clinical trials even safer."

ACTRI is an essential partner in most clinical trials conducted at UC San Diego Health, providing support in the form of informatics tools, work space and trained personnel, an infusion center, an investigational drug pharmacy, a Phase I drug testing unit and education and training programs. Nearly 1,000 clinical and translational research faculty and staff are housed in the 7-story, 359,000-square-foot Altman CTRI building, which opened in 2016.

There are approximately 2,400 ongoing clinical trials at UC San Diego Health, involving an estimated 7,000 participants in active treatment. Approximately 250 new trials begin each year, including most recently COVID-19-related trials investigating an antiviral drug, an arthritis drug and a medication for hypertension.

Firestein, an internationally recognized translational researcher, is co-leader of the NCATS' Accrual to Clinical Trials platform, which links electronic medical records of more than 50 academic medical centers across the country and has been expanded to provide comprehensive medical data to COVID-19 researchers. The ACTRI has also created an

institutional COVID-19 biobank to enable development of novel diagnostics and treatment for the virus and has collaborated with UC San Diego Health to screen all health care workers and assure a safe workplace.

Part of a national CTSA consortium, ACTRI members have affiliations that include UC San Diego, San Diego State University, Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute, Salk Institute for Biological Studies, Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego, Veterans Affairs San Diego Healthcare System and numerous nonprofits and biotech/pharma.

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Gary Firestein, MD, ACTRI director and dean and associate vice chancellor of clinical and translational research at UC San Diego School of Medicine.