

## UCSD Receives Nation's First Fellowship in Mitochondrial Medicine

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**D**avid Campbell was a charming little three-year-old boy from Mission Viejo, California who died in 2001 from Leigh's Syndrome, one of 40 types of mitochondrial disease – a disease many people have never heard of, but which is nearly as common as childhood cancer. Exactly four years after his death, a young doctor at the UCSD School of Medicine began seeing patients as part of her fellowship, the result of a gift from a charity established by David's mother, Catherine Campbell.

Campbell founded Wish Upon a Cure®, the David P. Campbell Foundation for Pediatric Mitochondrial Disease, which will fund a fellowship at UCSD's Department of Neurosciences in David's name. Mary J. Hall Willis, M.D., Ph.D. will complete a two-year fellowship under the direction of Dr. Richard H. Haas, M.B., B.Chir., MRCP, Professor of Neurosciences and Pediatrics at UCSD and co-director of UCSD's Mitochondrial and Metabolic Disease Center. Her training program, which began this July, includes clinical patient care and well as laboratory training and a primary research project in mitochondrial medicine.


"We are thrilled to fund the training and education of another clinician to help alleviate the patient backlog created by a shortage of doctors in this emerging field of medicine," said Campbell.

Mitochondrial diseases can be confusing to diagnose and complex to manage, according to Haas. Responsible for creating a large percentage of the energy need by the body to sustain life and growth, mitochondria are the cellular structures that function to convert the potential energy provided by food into usable energy. They are also essential for many of the body's metabolic functions. Mitochondrial dysfunction results in cell injury and organ failure. Symptoms range from loss of motor control and muscle weakness to cardiac and liver disease, gastrointestinal disorders, breathing difficulties, seizures and hearing or visual problems. Nearly 4,000 children are born each year with the disease and mortality ranges from 10 to 50% of patients, depending on the particular disease.

"We are very grateful for the tireless efforts of a charity like the David P. Campbell Foundation to provide support in attracting young specialists to the field of mitochondrial medicine," said Haas.

“The Fellowship is a wonderful opportunity to train someone who will continue to help patients for many years to come. Since mitochondrial disease has also been identified as an underlying factor for both Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s diseases, training a talented physician such as Dr. Willis will have a tremendous impact on helping many people.”

“The Wish Upon a Cure® Foundation was started by friends and neighbors in the Orange County community as a result of our son David’s death,” said Campbell. “What we’ve learned since then is that approximately one in every two- to three-thousand children born each year will suffer from a mitochondrial disease, and it’s nearly as common as childhood cancer. Because these diseases are within a newly emerging area of medicine, little attention has been paid to further research and treatments. So we continue our fight, not only on behalf of our son David, but on behalf of the thousands of other children who are fighting for their lives.”

**UCSD’s Mitochondrial and Metabolic Disease Center** was founded in 1996 to meet the growing need for treatment, diagnosis and research in the emerging field of mitochondrial medicine, bringing together the talents of physicians and researchers with special training in human genetics and metabolism. [Click here to learn more about the Center](#)  and its fight against this disease.

**Wish Upon a Cure®, the David P. Campbell Foundation for Pediatric Mitochondrial Disease,** was founded in 2001 following the death that year of David Campbell, who suffered from Leigh’s Syndrome, one of 40 types of mitochondrial disease. The foundation exists to fight these diseases on behalf of the children and adults who suffer. The organization raises awareness and educates others about these little-known diseases that are nearly as common as childhood cancer. The David P. Campbell Foundation, an all-volunteer organization, is a donor-advised fund of the Orange County Community Foundation.

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UCSD Health Sciences Communications HealthBeat

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