

Joan Heller Brown Appointed Chair Of UCSD's Department of Pharmacology

June 18, 2004

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Joan Heller Brown, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine, has been named chair of the Department of Pharmacology at UCSD. She was selected following a national search to replace former chair Palmer Taylor, Ph.D., who was named founding dean of the new UCSD School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in 2002.

"A preeminent leader in American pharmacology, Dr. Heller Brown is an outstanding administrator, excellent teacher, and an innovative researcher," said Edward W. Holmes, M.D., UCSD vice chancellor of health sciences and dean of the UCSD School of Medicine. "We are fortunate to have her leadership for our top-ranked pharmacology department."

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Cornell University, where she earned her B.A. degree in neurobiology, Heller Brown received her Ph.D. in pharmacology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Her postdoctoral studies were completed at the University of Colorado. A member of the UCSD faculty since 1975, Heller Brown has served as chair of UCSD's Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program, and as a member of the Faculty Council, the Faculty of Basic Biomedical Sciences Council, and the dean's Space Advisory Committee. She has served as interim chair of the pharmacology department since November 2002.

She was the recipient of an Established Investigator Award from the American Heart Association (AHA) and has been appointed as Fellow of the AHA, as well as of the International Society for Heart Research. She has served on the Scientific Advisory Board for a number of biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies and on the editorial and advisory boards of numerous journals including the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, *Cellular Signaling*, *Circulation Research*, *Molecular Interventions* and *Nature Reviews Drug Discovery*. She is an active member of the American Society for Experimental Therapeutics and served as editor of their flagship journal, *Molecular Pharmacology*.

Commenting on her appointment, Paul Insel, M.D., UCSD professor of pharmacology, noted that "Joan is first-rate in all that she undertakes. Her research, teaching, mentoring of students and post-doctoral fellows, editorial duties and service to both UCSD and the broader scientific community are consistently of very high caliber. Her contributions in research, in particular with respect to signal transduction mechanisms in the cardiovascular system, are widely recognized. In addition, Joan's positive interactions with colleagues at UCSD and elsewhere add to her effectiveness and the high esteem in which she is regarded."

Heller Brown's research focuses on how neurotransmitters and other chemical mediators affect various signaling pathways, causing altered cell growth or survival. Her studies examine various molecular messengers formed within cells that ultimately regulate cellular activity involved in cardiovascular diseases such as cardiac hypertrophy, hypertension and heart failure, and responses of the brain to disease and injury. She has published more than 140 papers and reviews in top ranked journals and contributed chapters to the textbooks *Basic Neurochemistry*, Goodman and Gilman's *Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics* and Braunwald's *Molecular Basis of Cardiovascular Disease*, a companion to Braunwald's *Heart Disease*.

The Department of Pharmacology, ranked first among the nation's academic pharmacology departments in research grant awards from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), became the first basic science department in the UCSD School of Medicine 18 years ago. Among the departments 19 full-time and 16 adjunct faculty are three Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigators and seven members of the National Academy of Science.

Pharmacology is broadly defined as a discipline that investigates the effects of chemical interventions on biological systems. The UCSD program is renowned for its strength in elucidating basic cellular and molecular mechanisms that lead to drug target identification and ultimately to drug discovery. Many of the department's research efforts impact directly on human health, supported by NIH grants on the genetics of hypertension, cardiovascular regulation, nuclear oncogenes, and neurological and inflammatory diseases.

The department's research directions include computational and molecular science, catalyzed by the department's close affiliation with the San Diego Supercomputer Center, and structure-based drug design and bioinformatics. Cross campus efforts in environmental health sciences and pharmacogenomics have been launched through major NIH funded project grants. Additional affiliations with adjunct faculty at the Salk Institute, the Scripps Research Institute, the Burnham Institute, and the appointment of adjunct faculty from the local biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry create a natural bond for cross fertilization and communication, bridging the department's basic science efforts, and the goal of improving efforts in drug discovery.

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UCSD's Department of Pharmacology

