UC San Diego
UC San Diego News Center

January 14, 2016 | By Scott LaFee

Noted Canadian Neurologist to Head UC San Diego Alzheimer's Disease Cooperative Study

Howard Feldman of University of British Columbia is known for seminal research in dementias; UC launches new $4 million Alzheimer's disease initiative

Howard Feldman, MD, FRCP(C), a renowned Canadian neurologist noted for his original research in geriatric cognitive disorders and expertise in large-scale clinical trials, has been named the new director of the Alzheimer's Disease Cooperative Study (ADCS) at University of California, San Diego, pending approval from the National Institute on Aging (NIA).

Howard Feldman, MD, FRCP (C), named new director of Alzheimer's Disease Cooperative Study (ADCS) at UC San Diego.

He will also serve as dean for Alzheimer's and Related Neurodegenerative Research at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

"Dr. Feldman is an extraordinarily accomplished physician and scientist, a thought leader in Alzheimer's disease clinical research," said Pradeep K. Khosla, chancellor of UC San Diego. "His research – and the many trials he has led – has been vastly influential in the field. His leadership will take ADCS to new levels, and further elevate UC San Diego's standing as a pioneering institution in Alzheimer's research and treatment."

Feldman's arrival coincides with the launch of a University of California (UC) program to accelerate the most promising Alzheimer's disease research into early proof-of-concept clinical trials. Sponsored by the UC Office of the President with a foundational grant of $4 million, the

UC Cures for Alzheimer's Disease Initiative invites hundreds of laboratories throughout the 10-campus system to find new answers to Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. The clinical trials will be coordinated at ADCS.

"Alzheimer's disease is a growing and unprecedented public health threat," said UC president Janet Napolitano. "Many of the world's best scientists and physicians dedicated to understanding and ultimately conquering Alzheimer's work at UC. This initiative and the important work done – and still-to-be-done – at ADCS under the leadership of Dr. Feldman is intended to more speedily translate some of their best ideas into new treatments and, hopefully, an eventual cure."

Feldman, a professor of neurology and executive associate dean of research at the University of British Columbia Faculty of Medicine in Vancouver, is a prolific physician-scientist credited with several key contributions in geriatric cognitive disorders, Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other dementias including frontotemporal dementia. He has published more than 150 peer reviewed scholarly papers in epidemiology, genetics, biomarker development and experimental therapeutics.

In a 2007 profile, the journal *Lancet Neurology* called him the "master of dementia." In 2014, the media and information conglomerate Thomas Reuters named Feldman among the "World's Most Influential Scientific Minds" (2002-2012) and one of the "Most Highly Cited Researchers in Neuroscience and Behavior" (2002-2012).

The ADCS was founded in 1991 by the late Leon Thal, MD, Distinguished Professor and Chair of Neurosciences at UC San Diego School of Medicine, with support from the National Institute on Aging. Currently, ADCS administers multiple clinical trials at test sites across the country.

Feldman has long been active in translating basic research into treatments that benefit patients. In 1991, the same year the ADCS was founded, Feldman established the Alzheimer Clinical Trials Program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). He has also served as director of UBC Hospital's Clinic for Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders. He led a national cohort study of disorders of Mild Cognitive Impairment (ACCORD study, 1997-2005) and contributed to the Canadian Study of Health and Aging, a highly influential project that followed 10,000 elderly Canadians over a ten-year period from 1991 to 2001, chronicling their changing health status.

He has been a lead principal investigator on a number of clinical trials exploring the use of cholinesterase inhibitors for AD and Mild Cognitive Impairment, a condition that often precedes AD. In addition, Feldman and colleagues have identified two causal genes of frontotemporal

dementia (FTD) and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), disorders which severely affect language behavior and motor function. These discoveries have provided important, new areas of interest in the development of treatment targets and biomarkers.

“I think dementia research has entered a new stage,” said Feldman. “Over the past two decades, we’ve learned an enormous amount about the biology of disease, and have advanced our ability for the first time to visualize the pathology of the dementias in the living brain. This heralds a new era in being able to mark the impact of treatment as we seek the elusive goal of slowing or preventing these dementias. Though progress has been slow, the urgency and scale of AD great within our aging society, I am optimistic that with a focused global effort we will succeed at improving the quality of life of those at risk or with dementia.”

In a 2014 paper published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Feldman and colleagues called for “a new research roadmap, one that pulls together government, regulators, industry, academia and the community in an unprecedented collaboration focusing on four key priorities: the fundamental mechanisms of disease; new translational research to speed basic research to clinical testing; innovative partnerships; and preventing AD.”

“We also have to emphasize the mantra of prevention,” Feldman said. “It has been projected that if in the coming three decades we can delay the onset of dementia by one year, we will be able to reduce the prevalence by 10 percent. Furthermore, if we delay it by five years, we can reduce the prevalence by 50 percent. Any scientific or medical advances that slow or prevent disease progression can exponentially benefit every aspect of society.”

Feldman’s understanding and vision for the future of AD treatment made him a compelling choice for the ADCS directorship, said David Brenner, MD, vice chancellor, UC San Diego Health Sciences and dean of UC San Diego School of Medicine. “Not to mention the extraordinary scope of his work and achievements. Dr. Feldman has rare and deep experience in both academia and in industry, a crucial combination. He understands how things work in both the lab and the clinic, and the needs of scientists, doctors and patients.”

From 2009 to 2011, Feldman took an unpaid leave from academia to work as vice-president and therapeutic area head of neuroscience for Global Clinical Research and Development at Bristol-Myers Squibb, a Connecticut-based pharmaceutical company. He was responsible for drug development related to AD, neuropathic pain, autism, depression, schizophrenia and migraine.

Feldman is a fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, the American Academy of Neurology and the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons. He is a member of the editorial board for a number of journals, serves on the scientific advisory board for several international conferences on AD and related disorders and is frequently called upon as a member of peer reviewed scientific panels. His research has been foundational to the Djavad Mowafaghian Center for Brain Health, a clinical and research collaboration between UBC Faculty of Medicine and Vancouver Coastal Health.

More about the UC Cures for Alzheimer's Disease Initiative

The new UC Cures for Alzheimer's Disease Initiative will leverage the strength and experience of ADCS and UC Biomedical Research Acceleration, Integration and Development (UC BRAID), a consortium of the five UC health campuses in which they share data and resources to improve health through ambitious research and clinical initiatives.

"No public research university devotes more resources to the study and treatment of Alzheimer's disease than University of California," said John. D. Stobo, MD, executive vice president of UC Health. "In just the past five years, more than 130 UC investigators have conducted 350 research projects in the field, receiving roughly $339 million in funding support for both basic research and clinical trials."

The initiative will fund two projects selected by an independent review committee comprised of experts both within and outside UC, providing $1 million annually for two years from the Office of the President. Matching funds from the campus of origin can also be used. Each proposal will include collaboration across at least two UC campuses. Applicants are also encouraged to partner with external public or private entities, such as foundations or industry.

The program is modeled upon the success of the California Initiative to Advance Precision Medicine, a collaboration announced earlier this year between UC, state government and other academic and industry partners to build the infrastructure and resources needed to advance development of more accurate diagnostic tools and therapies based upon individual genetics.

For information about applying for the initiative funding, please visit UC San Diego Clinical and Translational Research Institute. Awardees will be announced July 25, 2016.

MEDIA CONTACT

Jackie Carr, 858-249-0456, jcarr@ucsd.edu
Scott LaFee, 858-249-0456, slafee@ucsd.edu

UC San Diego's Studio Ten 300 offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via studio@ucsd.edu. To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts.