

UC San Diego Cancer Researchers Target Link between Obesity and Breast Cancer Risk

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A team of researchers from the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center will be participating in a cooperative agreement initiative, funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) of the National Institutes of Health, with four other major cancer centers. The Transdisciplinary Research on Energetics and Cancer (TREC) initiative is a five-year, \$45 million program that expands the effort to understand the relationship between energetics (energy under transformation) and cancer.

Ruth Patterson, PhD, a professor in the UCSD Department of Family and Preventive Medicine and program leader of the Cancer Prevention and Control Program at Moores Cancer Center, will lead UCSD researchers in a study of insulin resistance and inflammation underlying the association of energy balance and breast cancer.

“We are honored to be participating in this innovative collaboration as it is a competitive, high-profile grant,” said Patterson. “Our study aims to uncover the mechanistic links between obesity and breast cancer risk. If we understand the biological mechanisms linking obesity with risk, then we have the potential to design lifestyle interventions or identify drugs to reduce disease risk.”

More than 22 UCSD faculty members will be involved in the TREC project, which will be coordinated through Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, Washington. The TREC Coordination Center will handle dissemination and evaluation of data among the centers, which also include the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard University, and Washington University-St. Louis.

“NCI is very concerned about the epidemic of obesity and its implications for cancer,” said Robert Croyle, PhD, director of NCI's Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences. “This investment reflects the urgency of the problem and the need to accelerate scientific progress to inform cancer control strategies.”


The overall objective of the UCSD TREC Center is to assemble transdisciplinary scientific collaborators to address questions regarding insulin resistance and inflammation underlying the relationship of diet, physical activity, and obesity with breast cancer.

“Pairing groups from different universities tends to yield more creative collaboration,” said Patterson. “Looking at problems together with experts who have different backgrounds and ideas, spurs creativity.”

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