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LA BioMed to Receive Recovery Act Grants To Advance Scientific Research and Create Jobs

LOS ANGELES (Dec. 14, 2009) – Researchers at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center ([LA BioMed](#)) expect to receive more than \$4.5 million in grants from the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act](#) (Recovery Act.), including nearly \$1 million from the highly competitive Challenge Grant program for a study that seeks to reduce the number of children who die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, it was announced today.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is distributing the grants to help stimulate the U.S. economy through the support and advancement of scientific research. [Challenge Grants](#) support research on the NIH priority areas. It reported receiving more than 20,000 applications for more than \$200 million in fiscal 2009 Challenge Grants and awarding just 804.

One of those Challenge Grants is going to LA BioMed for a project to screen infants for a rare hereditary disorder that is a cause for sudden death in infancy and early childhood, Jervell and Lange-Nielsen syndrome. Ruey-Kang R. Chang, MD, MPH, a pediatric cardiologist at LA BioMed, is the principal investigator.

“This award to LA BioMed will present an extraordinary chance to advance biomedical research while creating jobs in local communities and opportunities for talented young and new investigators,” said Elizabeth G. Nabel, MD, and director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health, which awarded the Challenge Grant to LA BioMed. “We look forward to the outcome of this research, which will contribute to a better understanding of how we can improve the health of the American public.”

Recovery Act funding also will help finance LA BioMed studies of heart and liver disease, a highly promising vaccine candidate to prevent life-threatening infections of the blood caused by the fungus *Candida*, cancer immune therapies for melanoma and much more.

“These grants to LA BioMed will create new jobs for the region and fund vital research,” said U.S. Rep. Jane Harman, D-Venice. “LA BioMed is a leader in translating discoveries into new treatments and improved therapies for disease. My congratulations to the doctors and researchers whose innovation and hard work will help save lives.”

“LA BioMed’s success in obtaining these grants is further evidence of the strength of the Institute’s research enterprise and the dedicated investigators we have on campus,” said LA BioMed President and CEO David I. Meyer, PhD. “I congratulate each of the investigators for presenting such outstanding grant proposals that they were able to secure significant funding in such a highly competitive environment.”

Following is a description of the LA BioMed grants from Recovery Act funding:

- **\$999,922 to Ruey-Kang Chang, MD, MPH**, in a challenge grant. Only about 3% of applicants from around the country received a challenge grant. Dr. Chang received the grant to seek early detection and treatment of a rare hereditary disease, Jervell and Lange-Nielsen syndrome, which is the most severe form of Long QT Syndrome. It accounts for 10% of the deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Because hearing loss is an important clinical feature of Jervell and Lange Nielsen

syndrome, Dr. Chang and his team of researchers will work with the California Newborn Hearing Screening Program to conduct cardiac screening of those infants found to have hearing loss to determine if they also have Jervell and Lange-Nielson syndrome.

“If we can find infants with Jervell and Lange-Nielsen syndrome before they start suffering from the symptoms, we can treat them effectively with medication and other means and prevent them from going into an arrhythmia which may cause death,” said Dr. Chang.

He said the study, if successful, could lead to a national screening for Jervell and Lange-Nielsen syndrome because almost all the states are now checking infants for hearing loss.

- **\$1.3 million to Matthew J. Budoff, MD.** Dr. Budoff received one grant for more than \$1 million to study heart and liver disease and its connection to the obesity epidemic. He also will receive another \$260,000 to examine heart disease in women on estrogen therapy.
- **\$710,764 to Brad Spellberg, MD,** to further studies on a highly promising vaccine candidate to prevent life-threatening infections of the blood caused by the fungus *Candida*. The grant will help LA BioMed researchers define how the vaccine trains hunter-killer white blood cells to kill the fungus, thereby protecting against *Candida* infections. These results will lay the groundwork for maximizing the efficacy of the vaccine and will also elucidate fundamental ways by which the immune system defends the body from infections similar to those caused by *Candida*.
- **\$428,000 in two grants to Noah Craft, MD, PhD.** One grant will help support **Hermes Garban MD, PhD**, in the Division of Dermatology. This project will study the mechanisms involved in cancer immune therapies with the goal of enhancing the design of future immunotherapies for melanoma and other cancers that can evade the immune system. The second grant funded the recent purchase of both a Luminex multiplex analysis system and also a 7900HT 384 well Fast Real-Time PCR machine. This equipment will facilitate further studies into a vaccine against Leishmaniasis, a parasitic infection that causes death and illness in millions of humans living in and traveling to the developing world.
- **\$408,951 to Kamyar Kalantar-Zadeh, MD, MPH,** to understand sources of bias and outcomes in peritoneal dialysis patients. The goal of the study is to examine survival data in the DaVita dialysis patient databases to identify subgroups of dialysis patients with superior survival with either dialysis modalities, leading to better clinical and economic outcomes.
- **\$140,920 to Yue Fu, MS, PhD,** to understand how *Candida*, a cause of lethal infections in hospitalized patients, causes such infections to create new ways to prevent and treat these infections.
- **\$136,960 to Virender K. Rehan, MD, MRCP, MRCPI, FAAP,** for further studies on fundamental molecular mechanism(s) of pulmonary dysfunction in growth-restricted offspring to enable the researchers to design novel intervention strategies that may not only prevent, but also reverse intrauterine growth restriction associated lung damage during postnatal life. The researchers are building on the growing evidence that infants who are delivered following growth restriction during the fetal period have significant lung morbidity during their postnatal life.
- **\$282,750 in two grants to Mina Desai, MSc, PhD.** One grant is for the study of the role of a specific endocrine system, adipose renin-angiotensin, in the development of adult hypertension and obesity in growth-restricted newborns. The second grant is for another study of programmed adipogenesis and lipid dysregulation.

- **\$113,107 to Scott Filler, MD**, to continue and expand research into identifying the genes that make individuals more susceptible to candidiasis, an often lethal infection.

About LA BioMed

Founded in 1952, LA BioMed at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center is one of the country's largest nonprofit independent biomedical research institutes. It conducts biomedical research, trains young scientists and provides community services, including childhood immunization and nutrition assistance. The institute's researchers conduct studies in such areas as cardiovascular disease, emerging infections, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, dermatology, reproductive health, vaccine development, respiratory disorders, inherited illnesses and neonatology. LA BioMed is academically affiliated with the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. For more information, please visit www.LABioMed.org

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