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UCSF research on mood disorders aims to advance understanding and treatment of depression

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A gift of \$20 million from the Ray and Dagmar Dolby Family Fund to the Department of Psychiatry at UC San Francisco will support research on mood disorders, aiming to rapidly advance the understanding and treatment of depression, bipolar disorder and related illnesses.

The new gift will support pioneering UCSF research on the genetics, neurobiology and brain circuitry underlying these disorders, with the ultimate goal of discovering better therapies to improve the lives of patients and their families and, in turn, eliminating the stigma surrounding mental illness.

"This research is a critical step forward for the millions of people who suffer, seemingly invisibly, with diseases that are real and unfortunately underfunded," said Dagmar Dolby. "Our family is pleased to support UCSF as it advances this research to foster greater knowledge and understanding, and break down the stigma around mental illness."

According to the World Health Organization, depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting an estimated 350 million people of all ages. Progress in understanding, treating and preventing depression and bipolar disorder has been slow, however, and no truly new medications for these illnesses have been developed in decades.

The Dolby family's gift comes at an opportune time to help break this therapeutic logjam, said Matthew W. State, MD, PhD, chair and Oberndorf Family Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry at UCSF, as rapid progress in psychiatric genomics and neuroscience is occurring, while traditional barriers between medicine and psychiatry and across scientific disciplines erode.

"UCSF offers an ideal environment for making real progress on these debilitating disorders. The Department of Psychiatry is emerging as a full partner in a powerhouse basic and clinical neuroscience community at UCSF, and shedding the typical territoriality of psychiatry versus neurology versus neurosurgery," said State. "By leading the charge on the research side, we can make a tremendous difference in people's lives and at the same time transform how people think about mental illness, ending the destructive stigmatization and marginalization of our patients. Serious mental illnesses are not fundamentally different from heart disease, cancer or epilepsy—we just don't understand them well enough yet."

The new gift will create an endowment for recruiting two senior distinguished professors with expertise in mood disorders, and will provide support for world-class junior faculty with a special interest in these illnesses. In addition, the donation will support clinical research and treatment programs, many of which will be carried out at a new UCSF mental health center at Mission Bay, announced earlier this year and slated to open in the spring of 2019.

With this new building and a number of important collaborations underway, State said UCSF is particularly well positioned to leverage this new gift to benefit patients and their families. The gift will also support new collaborative research projects between the Department of Psychiatry, the UCSF Memory and Aging Center (MAC), and the Kavli Institute for Fundamental Neuroscience (Kavli IFN), which was established with a joint \$20 million commitment from UCSF and the Kavli Foundation in October, 2015.

The MAC is a world-renowned research and treatment center for brain diseases associated with aging, and the Dolby gift will allow UCSF researchers to launch research projects on specific aspects of depression in the elderly, which carries significant health risks. Research at the Kavli IFN will focus on brain plasticity, or changeability, and the Dolby gift will foster collaborations to better understand how aberrant brain circuits at the root of depression and bipolar disorder could be altered by new therapies.

A collaboration with particular relevance to mood disorders is the SUBNETS initiative, a UCSF-led research endeavor funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). This \$26 million project, led by neurosurgeon Edward F. Chang, MD, draws on the expertise of faculty from UCSF's Departments of Neurosurgery, Neurology, and Psychiatry, as well as UCSF researchers in basic neuroscience.

The SUBNETS team is seeking cures for major depression and anxiety disorders by employing neural sensors to help break the code of circuit activity that underlies these brain states and by developing stimulation therapies to coax

the brain to "unlearn" the detrimental signaling patterns that underlie these diseases. The Dolby gift will help support integrated clinical research employing these techniques, expanding an already fruitful collaboration involving more than a dozen scientists, engineers and physicians from UCSF, UC Berkeley, Cornell University, New York University, and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

The Dolby family has been a generous donor to UCSF, most notably with a lead gift that provided funding for the construction of the Ray and Dagmar Dolby Regeneration Medicine Building, an architecturally significant structure on the Parnassus Heights Campus that houses the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regeneration Medicine and Stem Cell Research.

"The Dolbys have played a key role in helping UCSF advance research in some of the most promising areas of medicine," said UCSF Chancellor Sam Hawgood, MBBS. "We are grateful to them for their unflagging generosity and vision in helping us meet this next challenge. Mood disorders are serious, disabling illnesses, and our world-class researchers and physicians are well positioned to lead the way in discovering a new generation of treatments."

Source:

UC San Francisco (UCSF)
