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CANCER AND STEM CELL RESEARCHERS RECEIVE GRANT FROM THE PROSTATE CANCER FOUNDATION TO STUDY CANCER STEM CELLS

A team of researchers from UCLA's Jonsson Cancer Center and the Broad Stem Cell Research Center has received a $2.25 million grant to study prostate cancer stem cells and better define the role they play in cancer development, drug resistance and disease recurrence.

The team, led by Dr. Owen Witte, was one of eight groups chosen by the Prostate Cancer Foundation to receive a 2008 Challenge Award. Witte's group was chosen from a nationwide pool of more than 100 proposals. In all, the foundation committed more than $19 million to fund research to discover new treatments for recurrent prostate cancer.

Witte, director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research and the lead investigator for the UCLA team, said he was pleased to be picked for funding and that he and his colleagues are anxious to launch their project.

"Cancer stem cells can lay dormant, but they have the ability to grow and the cancer will come back, usually at a later, more serious and more deadly stage," said Owen Witte, who also is a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator and a nationally renowned cancer researcher. "Those cancer stem cells are the cells that we really need to fear and treat, because those are the cells that will make a cancer come back."

Witte's team includes Dr. Pei-Yu Choiu, an assistant professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering; Dr. Isla Garraway, an assistant professor of urology; Dr. Michael Teitell; an associate professor of pathology and laboratory medicine; Dr. Hong Wu; a professor of molecular and medical pharmacology; and Dr. Inder M. Verma of the Salk Institute in San Diego.

Howard Soule, the Prostate Cancer Foundation's executive vice president of discovery and translation, said the approved projects "will deliver critical contributions to the rapidly growing base of scientific knowledge on prostate cancer."

"These awards are aimed at accelerating breakthrough discoveries that can potentially end death and suffering from prostate cancer," Soule said. "That is our single focus and goal."

The Challenge Awards invest in larger, multi-year projects with high potential for solving problems associated with advanced prostate cancer and those that may lead to better treatments for the disease.

Challenge grant recipients were chosen by a peer review committee of scientific and clinical experts.

The stem cell center was launched in 2005 with a UCLA commitment of $20 million over five years. A $20 million gift from the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation in 2007 resulted in the renaming of the center. With more than 150 members, the Eli and Edythe Broad Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research is committed to a multi-disciplinary, integrated collaboration of scientific, academic and medical disciplines for the purpose of understanding adult and human embryonic stem cells. The institute supports innovation, excellence and the highest ethical standards focused on stem cell research with the intent of facilitating basic scientific inquiry directed towards future clinical applications to treat disease. The center is a collaboration of the David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA's Jonsson Cancer Center, the Henry Samueli School of Engineering and Applied Science and the UCLA College of Letters and Science. To learn more about the center, visit our web site at ***http://www.stemcell.ucla.edu/*.**

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