Institute Co-Director Wins Coveted MetLife Foundation’s 2005 Award

Institute researcher and co-director Frank LaFerla was recently recognized as a “Promising Work” recipient of the 2005 MetLife Foundation Award for Medical Research in Alzheimer’s disease. He is one of three researchers world-wide to receive the award this year for his significant contributions to the understanding of Alzheimer’s disease. As part of this distinction, Frank received a $100,000 grant to be used to further his research. He was formally recognized in February by the MetLife Foundation at an awards luncheon in Washington, D.C.

“I am honored to receive this award and thankful to MetLife Foundation for supporting basic research in this important field,” LaFerla said. “Alzheimer’s disease is a devastating neurological disorder that affects millions of people and has a significant impact in our community and on our economy. We need to invest more in basic research so that we have the tools to understand and ultimately treat this disease.”

In recent years, Dr. LaFerla has been at the forefront of Alzheimer’s research and has made a number of significant strides in understanding the molecular development of the disease. He and other members of his team were the first to create a genetically altered mouse that allowed for the concurrent study of the two signature lesions of Alzheimer’s disease – plaques and tangles. Other work determined that chronic nicotine exposure worsens some Alzheimer-related brain abnormalities, contradicting the common belief that nicotine can actually be used to treat the disease. He also was principal investigator of a study that identified the protein beta amyloid and its buildup.
2005 Reeve-Irvine Research Medal Awarded to Dr. Carl W. Cotman

In October of 2005, Dr. Carl Cotman, Director of the Institute for Brain Aging, was awarded the Reeve-Irvine Research Medal at the Christopher Reeve Foundation Magical Evening Gala at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York City. The event was attended by a host of celebrities and supporters of the Foundation including Dana Reeve, Robyn Williams, Meryl Streep, Paul Newman, Diane Sawyer, Michael Douglas, and Catherine Zeta Jones.

The Reeve-Irvine Research Medal recognizes an individual, or individuals, who have made highly meritorious scientific contributions in the area of central nervous system repair, and whose research has stood the test of time and scrutiny. The medal and a $50,000 cash award is provided through the generosity of Joan Irvine Smith and Athalie R. Clarke Foundation, to recognize the work of pioneering investigators whose work has brought us closer to cures for the repair of the damaged nervous system.

The 2005 Reeve-Irvine Research Medal was awarded to Drs. Carl W. Cotman and Geoffrey Raisman for discoveries related to sprouting and synapse reorganization in the central nervous system. Their findings led to breakthroughs in our understanding of adult neuroplasticity, the natural ability of the brain and spinal cord to form new connections to compensate for injury. They are the basis for studies that continue today on mechanisms of functional repair following spinal cord injury.

The brain’s neurons form intricate circuits where one neuron connects to others to receive, process and send out signals in an ongoing dialogue. Neurons form connections to each other via synapses and form complex circuits. These circuits process the many functions of the nervous system, feeling, moving, and learning. Maintenance of these circuits is critical because if circuits and synaptic connections between neurons are lost as in stroke, spinal cord injury or degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease function is compromised. For many years, it was believed that brain and spinal cord circuits were incapable of any real growth and repair after damage. Dr. Cotman together with Dr. Raisman discovered that when neurons are damaged and degenerate those remaining sprout new connections and take over the function of the lost neurons. This phenomenon is called axon sprouting and forms the fundamental basis for research on the repair of the nervous system. With sprouting, neurons work like the ideal corporation where when one individual is lost others expand their work and take over the work load of the lost individual to maintain the corporation. Building upon the fundamental discovery of sprouting in the healthy brain, Dr. Cotman went on to demonstrate that sprouting also occurs in Alzheimer’s brains. Sprouting helps to delay functional decline as neurons degenerate in Alzheimer’s disease.

Carl W. Cotman, Ph.D. is a professor of Neurobiology and Behavior in the School of Biological Sciences and professor of Neurology in the College of Medicine. He is also Director of the UCI Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia, a multidisciplinary research effort combining basic science and clinical research in the areas of neurology, molecular biology, neurobiology and biochemistry.
A challenge for researchers working to develop treatments that may slow or halt Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is to identify the earliest signs of disease when treatments might have the greatest benefit. This is particularly difficult because there are no biomarkers (for example blood tests) that can tell us who will develop AD. At IBAD, we have been trying to understand early changes in brain pathology that may signal the development of AD by studying aging in another group of special individuals who are at high risk for developing the disease. These individuals have Down syndrome (DS) and have 3 copies of chromosome 21. The reason why adults with DS are at high risk for AD is that chromosome 21 contains the gene for the beta-amyloid precursor protein, which is cut by enzymes in the brain to make beta-amyloid. Beta-amyloid protein, in turn, forms senile plaques, which are one of the hallmarks of AD in the brain. Because people with DS are making more APP than normal they are also making more beta-amyloid and this leads to an early age of onset for AD. Around the age of 30 years, adults with DS begin to develop the early signs of AD in their brains that accelerate into full-blown AD usually by the age of 40 years. Because virtually all adults with DS over the age of 40 years have enough pathology in their brains for a diagnosis of AD we know that studying the brains of younger individuals will give us hints about the earliest changes we might expect to see in AD in the general population. However, it is interesting that not all adults over 40 years with AD pathology in their brains develop AD dementia and we may learn from adults with DS how to keep the brain functioning relatively well despite extensive pathology. At IBAD, we have a group of researchers who dedicate time to understanding aging in DS so that we may translate our findings to AD in general and hope to identify markers and treatments that may benefit both groups of people.

However, we do know that increasing age is one of the largest risk factors for developing AD. But, the actual age at which an individual person may develop the disease can vary widely with some people developing AD in their 60’s and others in their 90’s.
within neurons as the trigger that marks the onset of memory decline in Alzheimer’s dementia.

Two other UCI researchers previously have been recognized by MetLife Foundation for their work on Alzheimer’s disease: Carl Cotman, director of the Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia, who received the Medical Research award in 1988; and Douglas Wallace, director of the Center for Molecular and Mitochondrial Medicine and Genetics, in 1999. Notably, this marks the first time in the history of the MedLife award that two researchers from the same center have received distinguished awards for their contributions to Alzheimer’s disease.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on a tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. MetLife and MetLife Foundation have invested more than $15 million in Alzheimer’s research and public information programs. Since its inception in 1986, the foundation has given more than $10 million in personal prizes and grants as part of the Awards for Medical Research program.

The Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia is extremely proud of Dr. Frank LaFerla’s contributions to the field of Alzheimer research and we are thrilled that MetLife Foundation has recognized his years of hard work and efforts to unlock the mystery of Alzheimer’s disease.

Learn more about Dr. Frank LaFerla and the research that he conducts at the UCI Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia.

http://neurobiology.bio.uci.edu/faculty/laferla/ or by visiting the Institute for Brain Aging website at http://www.alz.uci.edu

Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center of California

at the
UCI Institute for Brain Aging & Dementia
1100 Gottschalk Medical Plaza
Irvine, CA 92697-4285
website: www.alz.uci.edu
For information and appointments please call: (949) 824-2382

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Specialized Educational Support Groups for FTD & Lewy Body Dementia Caregivers

WHEN? Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month from 9:30am-11:30am

WHERE? Meetings are held in the 1st floor conference room of the Gillespie Neuroscience Research Facility on the UCI Campus

We welcome all caregivers of patients with Frontal Temporal Dementia (e.g., Pick’s Disease and Primary Progressive Aphasia) and caregivers of those with Lewy Body Dementia to our monthly meetings.

Co-Facilitators are Shirley Sirivong of the UCI Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia and Jean Moonilal of the Alzheimer’s Association. For more information about the group, please call (949) 824-8135.
Alzheimer’s Disease: 100 Years of Discovery

Do you sometimes feel drained after attending a lecture on Alzheimer’s? Have you ever felt confused by complicated slides? Don’t feel alone and DO save the evening of Thursday, August 24 for an innovative play to commemorate the 100 year anniversary of the discovery of Alzheimer’s disease. This novel approach to raising awareness for AD research is free of charge and will be held at the beautiful Beckman Center, located at UC Irvine.

Join us in welcoming Master’s Repertory Theater to the stage to present “The Augusta Files,” a play by German researchers Konrad & Ulrike Maurer. The Maurers tell the story of Dr. Alois Alzheimer, who on November 4, 1906, gave a remarkable lecture at the 37th Conference of South-West German Psychiatrists where he described for the very first time, a form of dementia characterized by plaques and neurofibrillar tangles, in a female patient simply known as Auguste D.

The actual case notes from Augusta’s file, missing since 1909, then discovered by Dr. Maurer in Frankfurt in 1995, form the dialogue for the play which will enlighten and inform you in a way that you may not expect from an event focusing on this illness. Following the production, a panel of experts will field questions from the audience in an effort to establish where we stand, one hundred years later, in our quest to develop therapies, interventions, and an eventual end to this disease.

Guests will be treated to a wine & hors d’ oeuvres reception following the production. To request an invitation email kbailey@uci.edu. Again, there is no charge for the evening; however, donations for Alzheimer research will be gratefully accepted.

Calendar of Upcoming Events...

Family Educational Series

Co-Sponsored by the UCI Institute for Brain Aging & Dementia, Alzheimer’s Association, and Adult Day Services of Orange County. All sessions meet from 4:30-6:30pm at the University Club, UCI Campus. Call (949) 824-2382 for reservations and details.

June 6- Advances in Dementia Treatment and Care
September 5- Prevention Strategies in Dementia

Caring for a Loved One Series

Four individual workshops designed to give caregivers a better understanding of the aspects of caring for a loved-one. Participants may choose to attend one or all of the workshops. All 2006 classes will have registration & refreshments for the first ½ hour. Call (949) 955-9000 to RSVP or for more information.

♦ Respite, Self Care, And Resources
♦ Behaviors And Communication
♦ Legal Workshop: Medi-Cal Planning For Long Term Care
♦ Partnering With Your Doctor, Independence And Safety

April 6, 13, 20, 27 - Thursdays, 12:30-3:00 p.m., St. Jude Medical Center
Community Service Bldg.130 W. Bastanchury Road, Fullerton, CA  92835

May 31, June 7*, 14, 21, 28 - Wednesdays, 6:00-8:30 p.m., Adult Day Services of Orange County
9451 Indianapolis Avenue, Huntington Beach, CA  92646
*June 7 additional workshop, “Health Brain, Healthy Body”

September 7, 14, 21, 28 - Thursdays, 10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Sunflower Gardens3730 S. GreenvilleSanta Ana, CA  92704

2006 Annual Alzheimer’s Disease Research Conference
September 28-29, 2006  Irvine Hilton, Irvine

The Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia at the University of California, Irvine, the Alzheimer’s Association of Orange County, and Adult Day Services of Orange County are pleased to announce our annual collaborative Alzheimer’s Disease Research Conference. The conference will be held on Thursday, September 28 and Friday, September 29, 2006, at the Irvine Hilton.

This year’s conference has been designed to heighten the community’s awareness and knowledge of Alzheimer’s disease and related disorders. We have invited prestigious speakers who will present information about current research information into the cause, treatment, and cure of Alzheimer’s disease, state-of-the-art caregiver strategies, and better education and understanding about this devastating disease to families and professional caregivers. More information and registration details coming soon! For more information, call (949) 955-9000.
Love Leads to Legacy for Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia
One Family’s Story

By David Newman and Kim Bailey

In the words of Doris Newman’s son, David, “Sy was with my mother Doris for over fifteen years, and because he had no family of his own, we became his family—he was like a father to me.” This is the story of how one family became involved in the fight against Alzheimer’s disease and turned their own tragic loss into an ongoing legacy for present and future victims of the disease in our community.

David Newman lost his biological father at the age of fifteen. In the years following his father’s death, his mother would endure more losses, including several failed relationships and a subsequent marriage to yet another husband who passed away suddenly. Although she had never worked outside the home during the years she was raising David and his brother, she entered the workforce and became a successful fundraiser for the Cerebral Palsy Society, and later, the Zionist Organization of America. Always devoted to family and community, she was, in the words of her granddaughter, Jennifer, “an incredible woman who always pushed me and my brother Scott to read, learn, and go as far as we possibly can in life.” Brother Scott added that, “Grandma taught us to play chess and instilled in us a life-long love for museums and the arts.”

Doris had been living in London with her then-husband when he died, and she quickly returned to the Los Angeles area to be near David and his family. It was here that she met Sy Leavitt, and, for both of them it was a classic case of “love at first sight.” Sy and Doris spent over ten wonderful and inseparable years together enjoying the grandkids, travel, classical music, and their idyllic lifestyle in Irvine before David began noticing that his mother was, in fact, changing.

“Mom kept calling repeatedly and asking me the date of my son Scott’s upcoming bar mitzvah. Because her world revolved around occasions such as these, I knew something terrible was wrong.” When her forgetfulness increased, David urged Sy to take Doris to a specialist and it was then that Doris became a patient at the Alzheimer’s Disease Diagnostic & Research Center at UCI. Sadly, the diagnosis was Alzheimer’s disease, and the next few years that followed were difficult ones for Sy, David, and the entire family. Doris’ illness progressed at a fairly rapid pace, necessitating her move to a care facility where Sy visited her three to four times weekly up until the time of her death in 1995.

Sy’s gratitude for the compassionate, caring attitude and skill of the staff and clinicians at our clinic was made evident when he passed away last year, leaving a $500,000 estate gift to the Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia, in memory of his loving partner Doris Newman Jerome.

Gifts such as Mr. Leavitt’s are critical to the growth of the Institute, enabling us to continue advancing the research into the cause(s) and cure for Alzheimer’s disease. Bequests enable us to recruit new scientists, update our technology, fund new studies, and purchase needed equipment. Sy’s gift was not the only gift to emerge from this tragedy. David Newman, Doris’ son, is now an enthusiastic participant in the Institute’s Successful Aging Program. Like his mother, he has agreed to donate his brain to research, and he has driven from his private CPA practice in Woodland Hills to the clinic on an annual basis for the past five years to undergo tests which evaluate his memory, thinking...
New “Alliance” to Help Advance Research Efforts

In the last edition of the Brain Aging Bulletin, you may have read that a new circle of donors called “The Alliance Against Alzheimer’s Disease” has been formed at the Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia. Only one year in the making, this new group already has over twenty-five charter members and is growing strong! We would like to gratefully acknowledge these individuals and invite others to join with them in their efforts to advance the research into the cause(s) and cure for Alzheimer’s disease and other memory impairments affecting the many citizens in our community today.

Alliance donors give gifts of $1,000 or more annually, and are entitled to a variety of benefits, including invitations to members-only research receptions, and much, much more. For an information packet on the UCI Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia Alliance giving levels and benefits, please call Kim Bailey, Director of Community Development at (949) 824-3251 or email kbailey@uci.edu.

We also gratefully acknowledge Alliance advisory council members Virginia Atherton, Sharon Bowen, Diane Edwards, Suzanne Melin, Rick Muth, Linda Scheck, and Joyce Tucker for their efforts in spearheading the formation of the Institute’s first fundraising group.
Valproate Study for Alzheimer’s Disease
- Double-blind 26-month study to test the ability of Valproate to prevent the occurrence of behavior problems in individuals with Alzheimer’s disease
- For men and women 50 years of age or older who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, and who have not experienced agitation and/or psychosis since the onset of their illness

Huperzine Treatment Study of Alzheimer’s Disease
- Double-blind 24-week treatment study of huperzine A to improve memory and cognition in Alzheimer’s disease
- For men and women 55+ years of age or older who have been diagnosed with AD and are not taking a cholinesterase inhibitor (Aricept, Exelon, Razadyne), but can be on a stable dose of Namenda (Memantine)

R-Flurbiprofen Treatment Study for AD
- Double-blind, 18-month study of MPC-7869 to improve memory and cognition in Alzheimer’s disease
- For men and women over the age of 55 who have been diagnosed with AD
- Participants may be on stable doses of cholinesterase inhibitors and/or Namenda
- Cannot currently be taking more than 325 mg of aspirin per day

AAB-001 Treatment Study for AD
- Double-blind, 27-month study of AAB-001 to improve memory and cognition in Alzheimer’s disease
- For men and women 55-85 who have been diagnosed with AD
- Participants may be on stable doses of cholinesterase inhibitors and/or Namenda

Alzheimer’s Disease Neuroimaging Initiative
- This study is recruiting three groups of men and women, between 55-90 years of age:
  1) who have no memory complaints (normal);
  2) who have been diagnosed with a mild cognitive impairment (MCI); and
  3) who have been diagnosed with mild Alzheimer’s disease
- A non-treatment study designed to look at the usefulness of imaging studies (MRI and PET scans), biomarker tests, and paper and pencil memory testing to aid in the identification and treatment of Alzheimer’s disease at an early stage
- The study lasts for 36 months for normal and MCI participants, and 24 months for participants with mild AD

Antioxidant Study for Alzheimer’s Disease
- Double-blind, 4-month study of a combination of dietary supplements to test the safety, tolerability and effect on spinal fluid and blood biomarkers in individuals with Alzheimer’s Disease (AD)
- For men and women between 60-85 who have been diagnosed with AD
- Participants may be on stable doses of cholinesterase inhibitors and/or Namenda

For more information, please call (949) 824-5733 or visit our website at: http://www.alz.uci.edu/clinicaltrials/

Subjects must have a “study partner” - a friend or relative who can accompany the participant to all clinic visits and answer questions about him/her.
A special thank you for all of the donors who have contributed to the UCI Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia. Your generous and thoughtful gifts will help to promote advances in Brain Aging Research at the University of California, Irvine.

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1.) Checks should be made payable to UCI FOUNDATION and in the Memo section, please write: Alzheimer’s Disease Research

2.) If the donation is being made in memory/honor of someone, please include a note with information as to where the acknowledgements should be sent.

3.) Please mail all donations to:

Institute for Brain Aging & Dementia
1113 Gillespie Neuroscience Research Facility
Irvine, CA 92697-4540

There are many ways to support the clinical and basic science research activities at the UCI Institute for Brain Aging and Dementia. If you would like to receive more information on giving, please contact Kim Bailey at (949) 824-3251 or log on to: http://www.alz.uci.edu/donate.html
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April 2006
Caring For A Loved One Series
Thursdays, 12:30-3:00 pm
St. Jude Medical Center

May 2006
Caring For A Loved One Series
Wednesdays, 6:00-8:30 pm
Adult Day Services of Orange County

June 6, 2006
Family Educational Series Workshop
Advances in Dementia Treatment and Care

September 2006
Caring For A Loved One Series
Thursdays, 10:00 am - 12:30 pm
Sunflower Gardens

September 28-29, 2006
2006 Regional Alzheimer’s Disease Research and Education Conference
More information coming soon!

November 4, 2006
2006 Alzheimer’s Association Memory Walk
Camp James, Irvine

“Floating Emily” by Lucile
Artwork borrowed from 2006 Orange County Alzheimer’s Association Memories in the Making Calendar. The Calendar may be purchased by calling (949) 955-9000.