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## **TWO UCLA STEM CELL SCIENTISTS RECEIVE NEW FACULTY AWARDS FROM THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR REGENERATIVE MEDICINE**

Two UCLA scientists today received \$5.45 million in grants from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) to conduct leading-edge research that may shed light on the role of stem cells in the development of lung cancer and help to create a cancer-fighting immune system.

The scientists, Drs. Brigitte Gomperts and Antoni Ribas, are part of the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at UCLA. Also members of UCLA's Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, the UCLA scientists were among 23 researchers from throughout the state chosen to receive New Faculty Awards, designed to encourage and foster the next generation of stem cell researchers.

The awards are part of the second round of New Faculty Awards designed to support scientists establishing careers in stem cell research. In the first round, three UCLA stem cell scientists received \$7.5 million in New Faculty Awards.

Dr. Owen Witte, renowned scientist and director of the Broad stem cell research center, said he was pleased that Gomperts and Ribas received grants, adding that the awards are given to "promising scientists in critical stages of their careers as independent investigators and faculty members."

The awards are crucial, Witte said, because they provide money to young investigators early in their careers, when grants are typically difficult to secure, and at a time when funding for stem cell research is limited.

In all, more than \$59 million was awarded today by CIRM to provide salary and research support to young scientists for up to five years. The funding is meant to allow researchers to create a stable environment to build innovative and robust stem cell research programs in California.

Gomperts, an assistant professor of pediatric hematology/oncology, will use her \$2.38 million grant to fund the use of cutting-edge technologies to characterize the different stem cell populations found in the lung, and determine how they form lesions that later develop into lung cancers. Gomperts' goal is to develop a screening test for lung cancer stem cells that can predict which patients are most at risk for developing lung cancer in order to diagnose the disease at an early stage, when it is most treatable. She ultimately hopes to develop a new stem cell-based therapy for preventing and treating lung cancer.

Ribas, an associate professor of hematology/oncology, will use his \$3.07 million grant to define the biology of stem cell engineering to produce a cancer-fighting immune system. The goal of the research is to put T cell receptor genes into stem cells to generate a renewable source of lymphocytes that will fight cancer. The receptor genes function like a steering wheel for lymphocytes, allowing them to travel around the body and specifically find and attack cancer cells.

The awards were approved today at a meeting of CIRM's governing body, the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee. CIRM was established in early 2005 after the passage of Proposition 71, which provided \$3 billion in stem cell research funding.

To date, UCLA stem cell center scientists have successfully competed for 21 CIRM grants totaling more than \$51 million, 19 awarded for research projects and two awarded to fund the creation of new facilities for embryonic stem cell research.

UCLA's stem cell center was launched in 2005 with a \$20 million commitment over five years from UCLA. Since that time, institute officials have recruited some of the country's top stem cell scientists to fill six of 12 new faculty positions. The new faculty members – from renowned institutions such as Harvard, MIT and Johns Hopkins – were drawn to UCLA because of the highly collaborative research environment and the state's stem cell research-friendly atmosphere, Witte said.

In September 2007, in recognition of a \$20 million gift, the UCLA stem cell center was renamed the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at UCLA. The center is a collaboration of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, UCLA's Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, UCLA Henry Samueli School of Engineering and Applied Science, and the UCLA College of Letters and Science. It also involves close collaborations with the UCLA schools of law, nursing, dentistry and public affairs, UCLA AIDS Institute, UCLA Center for Society and Genetics, Brain Research Institute and the California Nanosystems Institute.

The center 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 center 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. For more information, visit [www.stemcell.ucla.edu](http://www.stemcell.ucla.edu).

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