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Grants further local research in children's brain cancer and stroke

PEORIA – (Aug. 19, 2015) The University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria (UICOMP) received more than \$280,000 in grants to fund new research aimed at two types of brain cancer commonly found in children, and to use stem cells as treatment following a stroke. The grants are from the Illinois Neurological Institute and the William E. McElroy Charitable Foundation.

The College of Medicine has active basic science research involving many types of cancer and areas in the neurosciences, including stroke, Alzheimer's Disease, spinal cord injury and the neurotoxicology of environmental agents.

Children's Cancer Research – Funded by the McElroy Foundation

Dr. Kiran Velpula, a UICOMP researcher who has studied cancer for more than a decade, said their preliminary findings on treating medulloblastoma show promise. "We recently uncovered a molecule that previously was unstudied but appears vital for inhibiting tumor growth, and we believe also offers a new path for treatment," Dr. Velpula said.

Medulloblastoma is the most common type of malignant brain tumors found in children. Despite aggressive therapies, including radiation and chemotherapy, the overall 5-year survival rate may not exceed 60 percent depending on the age of the child and the aggressiveness of the tumor.

UICOMP researchers are also studying another type of children's cancer, neuroblastoma, which commonly affects children under age 5. Dr. Sanjeeva Mohanam's research looks at how reduced oxygen levels to these types of tumors affect tumor growth. "These studies should generate major insights into how the tumors progress under reduced oxygen levels, and in turn suggest new targets for therapeutic interventions," said Dr. Mohanam.

Stroke Research – Funded by Illinois Neurologic Institute and the McElroy Foundation

UICOMP researcher Dr. Krishna Veeravalli is expanding a study showing that stem cells – derived from human umbilical cord blood – prevent stroke induced brain cell death.

"There are significant differences between males and females in frequency and severity of disease and treatment outcomes after a stroke," says Dr. Veeravalli. "We've seen the potential that stem cells have for

providing neuroprotection and recovery after stroke and spinal cord injury. The main objective of our study is to determine how age and sex differences affect treatment outcome after stem cell therapy.” This, Dr. Veeravalli said, will help validate stem cell use as a benefit for both sexes.

Stroke is a leading cause of serious long-term disability and fifth leading cause of death in the U.S. Stroke kills almost 130,000 Americans each year and about 795,000 people in the U.S. suffer a stroke each year. Stroke causes the United States an estimated \$34 billion each year.

THE ILLINOIS NEUROLOGICAL INSTITUTE:

The Illinois Neurological Institute (INI) is one of the most comprehensive neuroscience centers in the Midwest with more than 60 neurological experts. The INI offers multidisciplinary neurological, neurosurgical and rehabilitative care for adults and children. The INI is located on the campus of OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, a Level 1 Trauma Center and Comprehensive Stroke Center, where highly trained physicians are prepared to respond to even the most complex neurological problems.

THE MCELROY FOUNDATION

William E. McElroy, a long-time resident and Postmaster of Springfield, Ill., established the foundation. Mr. McElroy passed away in 1992. The Foundation makes grants to students pursuing an education involving research in the fields of heart disease and cancer, and to institutions doing such research.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS COLLEGE OF MEDICINE AT PEORIA

One of four campuses that make up the largest public medical school in the U.S., the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria (UICOMP) educates more than 150 medical students annually and more than 170 residents and fellows in 18 graduate medical programs. UICOMP is home to the cutting-edge Cancer Research Center, the Center for Outcomes Research and is a collaborator in the Jump Trading Simulation & Education Center.

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