CENTER FOR HIV/AIDS VACCINE IMMUNOLOGY (CHAVI)

George M. Shaw, MD, PhD
Beatrice Hahn, MD
(Hematology/Oncology)

One of the largest grants ever to come out of the NIH was recently awarded to establish the Center for HIV/AIDS Vaccine Immunology (CHAVI). Barton Haynes, M.D., of Duke University, is lead investigator. CHAVI may receive more than $300 million over seven years, $15 million during its first year. CHAVI's mission is to address key immunological roadblocks to HIV vaccine development and to design, develop and test novel HIV vaccine candidates.

The CHAVI senior scientific investigators include Norman Letvin, M.D., Harvard Medical School; Joseph Sodroski, M.D., Harvard Medical School; George Shaw, M.D., Ph.D., the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine, and Andrew McMichael, M.D., Oxford University, Oxford, UK. Beatrice H. Hahn, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Microbiology and Co-Director of the UAB CFAR, will lead an international team of CHAVI investigators in analysing the genetic diversity of HIV-1 and its implications for vaccine development. For more information, please see http://www.niaid.nih.gov/

16.3 MILLION FOR AIDS RESEARCH

George M. Shaw, MD, PhD
(Hematology/Oncology)

Dr. George Shaw, Professor of Hematology and Oncology, Department of Medicine (UAB), and Investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, has been awarded a five-year, $16.3 million grant to support clinical and laboratory research in the U.S., Europe and Africa in order to study changes that occur in the immune system and in the HIV virus in people newly infected with HIV.

Dr. Shaw, lead investigator, and others from clinical and laboratory research sites in the U.S., Europe, and Africa, will study people who have recently become infected with HIV, to analyze the changes that occur over time in their immune systems and in the virus itself. For more information please see, http://www.gcg.org/PDFFiles/P4/GCGH_Grants_Backgrounder_(2).pdf

SCHUMACHER DIRECTS BEHAVIOR SCIENCES CORE

Joseph E. Schumacher, PhD
(Preventive Medicine)

The Center for AIDS Research announces that Joseph Edward Schumacher, PhD has agreed to serve as Director of the Behavior Sciences Core. Dr. Schumacher is Professor of Medicine, Clinical Psychologist and Behavioral Scientist in the School of Medicine at The University of Alabama at Birmingham. His primary academic appointment is in the Division of Preventive Medicine. Dr. Schumacher has been working for UAB since 1991. In his new role, he will team up with other CFAR Core Directors to provide leadership on a variety of issues. Dr. Schumacher replaces Dr. Leslie Clark, who left UAB in March 2005. He can be reached at 205 934-4140 or jschum@uab.edu. Please join the CFAR in welcoming our newest Core Director.

UAB/SRI HIV-1 LATENCY PROJECT

Olaf Kutsch, Ph.D.
(Hematology/Oncology)

HIV-1 therapy has continuously improved over the years; however, it still fails to eradicate the virus from infected patients. The ability of HIV-1 to persist in the face of highly active antiretroviral therapy in a latent or “dormant” state in long-lived, so-called “memory T cells”, turns out to be a major obstacle to the development of a curative therapy. Two years ago, Dr. George Shaw initiated a joint UAB/SRI research program, with the goal to identify new agents or strategies to deplete these latent viral reservoirs in patients, a prerequisite for any curative therapy. “The program has received a lot of support from both institutions” says Dr. Olaf Kutsch, P.I. on the RO1 that now drives the program. “Dr. Koopman, Dr. Marchase and Dr. Saag have pushed hard to make things happen here, and so did their counterparts at SRI, Mr. Lonergan (CEO) and Dr. Secrist. We have already screened 15,000 compounds and hope that some of our initial hits will turn out to be relevant. We also have developed several additional drug screening assays that would allow us to also identify novel HIV-1 inhibitors. If one looks at the expertise of UAB and SRI in HIV-1 and drug research, a combined UAB/SRI HIV-1 drug development program would be very strong and highly competitive.”

NATIONAL MULTI-CENTER STUDY

Michael Saag, MD
(Division of Infectious Diseases)

Due to a need for new drugs to treat patients who have developed drug resistance to current therapies, a new interventional study sponsored by the National Institute of Al
lergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is under way at UAB. The study aims to determine whether the first of a new class of HIV drugs, called AMD11070, is safe and effective in preventing the HIV virus from entering healthy cells. This national multicenter study is being led by Michael Saag, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Director of UAB Center for AIDS Research. For additional information, including a list of participating sites, see http://www.clinicaltrials.gov.

HIV PREVENTION CONFERENCE

Laura Bachmann, MD, M.P.H. (Infectious Diseases)

Dr. Laura Bachmann, Assistant Professor of Medicine, CFAR member, and recipient of a 2004 CFAR Developmental Award gave a plenary lecture on June 13th at the 2005 CDC HIV Prevention Conference in Atlanta entitled, “Effective Approaches to Preventing and Controlling STIs among People Living with HIV.” The purpose of the lecture was to review epidemiology of sexual risk behaviors and STIs in the HIV infected population and to review STI screening strategies pertinent to this population.

CFAR DINNER LECTURES

www.uabcfar.uab.edu/lectures/dinner

Stephen H. Hughes, PhD (September 7, 2005)

Dr. Hughes is Chief of the Retroviral Replication Laboratory and Chief of the Vector Design and Replication Section for the HIV Drug Resistance Program at the National Cancer Institute. His research interests include the structure and function of HIV-1 reverse transcriptase (RT) and retroviral replication and vector design. For more information, please see http://home.ncifcrf.gov/hivdrp/Hughes_res.html

Nathaniel Landau, PhD (October 5, 2005)

Dr. Landau is a Professor at The Salk Institute. His research areas of interest include understanding how the coreceptor mediates infection and how it affects the rate at which infected individuals progress to disease. For more information, please see http://main.uab.edu/show.asp?durki=31225

James Robinson, M.D. (October 26, 2005)

Dr. Robinson is a Professor in the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Department at Tulane Hospital for Children. His research interests include EBV infections and Pediatric Virology. For more information see http://cgi.photobooks.com/scripts/troll.cgi?dbase=tulaneweb&display=Y&page=2&department=Tulane+Hospital+for+Children&pict_id=robinsi

THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE PRACTICE OF HIV MEDICINE

Malcolm Marler, D.Min. (1917 Clinic)

Malcolm Marler, D.Min., Chaplain at The 1917 Clinic at UAB, was a featured plenary speaker on “The Influence of Spirituality in the Practice of HIV Medicine” at the 8th Annual Clinical Conference for the Ryan White CARE Act Title I, II, III, and IV Grantees on June 16-17, 2005. The conference was sponsored by the International AIDS Society USA and represented 80% of all treatment centers for HIV disease in the U.S.

Marler discussed the importance of the attitude of medical providers toward their patients’ spirituality and what a significant impact it has on the level of trust and cooperation between the patient and provider. “We certainly do not expect physicians and nurses to be theologians with their patients,” he said. “Instead, we're encouraging providers to ask an extra question about where a patient finds strength, hope, and purpose in one’s life during health challenges.”

“By asking an extra question and listening to the response, a physician and patient can establish a foundation for a collaborative partnership that seeks to care for the whole person—body, mind, and spirit,” Marler suggested.

In conclusion, Rev. Marler outlined The Support Team Network at UAB as a model to create a community for people when they need it most through volunteer teams. The Support Team Network began at UAB in 1994 and has grown into a national program that supports persons with any health concern. For more information see http://www.SupportTeam.org.