WAGGONER CENTER MEMBER RECEIVES MERIT AWARD

Dr. Rueben A. Gonzales, the Jacques P. Servier Regents Professor in Pharmacy and member of the Waggoner Center for Alcohol and Addiction Research, recently received a $2.8 million Method to Extend Research in Time (MERIT) Award from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

The MERIT Award provides up to ten years of research support to a limited number of investigators with a history of outstanding contributions to their research field. The award is intended to foster continued creativity and lessen the administrative burdens associated with the preparation and submission of research grant applications. The award is tied to his grant titled “Neurochemical Mechanisms of Ethanol Self-Administration.”

Dr. Gonzales and his team investigate the chemical changes in the brain that underlie alcohol drinking. Of particular interest is the role of dopamine, a chemical produced and found in the brain that relays, amplifies, or modulates signals between a neuron and another cell. Dopamine, Gonzales explains, is known to be associated with behaviors that bring pleasure such as those triggered by drinking. His lab is working to determine exactly when and where in the brain the dopamine response occurs. This information, he says, will help to determine the role of dopamine in the development of addictive behaviors. Eventually, basic knowledge of how brain chemicals change in response to alcohol may help to develop new treatments for those who have drinking problems. “We know that dopamine does play a role in the urge to drink,” he said. “What we're trying to determine in our lab is exactly when the dopamine response occurs. That will help answer the basic question of how the dopamine response may guide the individual to select drinking over other behaviors.”

Investigators cannot apply for MERIT Awards. Instead, researchers apply to NIAAA for new or renewal grants, known as R01 grants. From those applications, NIAAA staff and members of the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism review R01 applications that meet the criteria for a MERIT Award. The MERIT Award has become a symbol of scientific achievement in the research community.

Dr. Gonzales gratefully acknowledges the contributions of his lab team, graduate students from pharmacology and neuroscience, as well as undergraduate science majors, who carry out the daily operations of the lab.
ARRA FUNDS AWARDED TO WAGGONER CENTER RESEARCHERS

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, enacted in February, provided funding to several members of the Waggoner Center. Recovery Act funding to The University of Texas at Austin totaled 50 awards at over $10 million in funding per year for two years. Almost a third of those funds, amounting to nearly $6 million over a two-year period, went to Waggoner Center faculty members:

R. Adron Harris, Principal Investigator
MEDICATION DEVELOPMENT FOR TREATMENT OF ALCOHOLISM. Establishes the Center for Medication Development for Treatment of Alcoholism. This P20 Center combines the talents of experienced alcohol researchers and experts in chemistry, proteomics, gene delivery, and Drosophila genetics who are new to the alcohol field to develop novel treatments for alcoholism.

R. Dayne Mayfield, Principal Investigator
NEXT-GEN SEQUENCING: SEARCHING FOR MECHANISMS OF ALCOHOL AND NICOTINE DEPENDENCE. Utilizes state-of-the-art next-generation sequencing (ABI SOLiD technology) to profile transcriptional regulation in human brain regions that are known substrates of reward circuitry involved in the development of alcohol and nicotine dependence.

Kim Fromme, Principal Investigator
ALCOHOL AND BEHAVIORAL RISKS THROUGHOUT COLLEGE. Tracks the alcohol use and behavioral risks of 6,600 students during the transition from high school to and throughout the college years. Identification of factors that increase or decrease both alcohol use and behavioral risks during college will have significant implications for policy and prevention efforts on college campuses.

Individual, foundation and corporate support is essential to the continued growth and success of this world-class research center. To support the Waggoner Center for Alcohol and Addiction Research, please visit:

www.cns.utexas.edu/development/outright.asp

or call: 512-471-3299
DOCTORAL DEGREES AWARDED

Dr. Jonathan Theile
(Morrisett Lab), October 13, 2009
Mechanisms in Ethanol Modulation of GABA Release onto Dopaminergic Neurons of the Ventral Tegmental Area

Dr. Nicole Riherd Methner
(Harris/Mayfield Labs), August 10th, 2009
Ethanol-Induced Regulation of the Human Dopamine Transporter

Dr. Beth Erlichman Goldstein
(Mihic Lab), July 10, 2009
Single Channel Analysis of Thiol Binding to a Putative Site of Alcohol Action on the Glycine Receptor

HONORS & AWARDS

Scott Davis (Pierce-Shimomura Lab) was selected to receive the 2009 John P. McGovern Award funded by the Texas Research Society on Alcoholism. The award provides $5,000 in research support.

NATIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE AWARDS FOR PREDOCTORAL FELLOWS

Roseanna Ramazani (Atkinson Lab)
“A Screen to Identify Mutations that Disrupt Alcohol Tolerance in Drosophila”

Armando Salinas (Morrisett Lab)
“Central Amygdala CART Modulates Ethanol Withdrawal Induced Anxiety”

PUBLICATIONS


The Waggoner Center for Alcohol and Addiction Research was established in 1999 at The University of Texas at Austin. The Center was made possible by a donation from M. June and J. Virgil Waggoner and matching funds from UT Austin. The mission of the Center is to create a premier research center for alcohol and addiction research, thereby developing solutions for the prevention and cure of these diseases.

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**PUBLICATIONS (continued)**


Reveron ME, Maier EY, Duvauchelle CL (2009) Behavioral; Thermal and Neurochemical Effects Of Acute And Chronic 3,4-Methylenedioxyamphetamine (“Ecstasy”) Self-Administration. Behav Brain Res.


