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Contact: JENNIFER SULLIVAN
O'Donnell Agency
(561) 832-3231
jennifer@theodonnellagency.com

NIAID AWARDS \$25 MILLION TO VGTI FL AND UCSF FOR ERADICATION OF HIV

Port St. Lucie, Fla. (July 12, 2011) – The National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), has awarded a \$25 million grant jointly to researchers from the Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute, Florida (VGTI FL) and the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). The award of nearly \$5 million a year for five years is part of the Martin Delaney Collaboratory, a funding opportunity designed to foster public-private partnerships to accelerate progress toward an HIV cure.

Primary researchers include investigators **Rafick-Pierre Sékaly, Ph.D.**, co-director and CSO of VGTI Florida; **Steven Deeks, M.D.**, professor of medicine at the UCSF Division of HIV/AIDS; and **Joseph “Mike” McCune, M.D., Ph.D.**, chief of the UCSF Division of Experimental Medicine. The team also includes an industry partner **Merck Research Labs**.

Approximately 40,000 new infections and 16,000 deaths from HIV are expected in the United States this year. Today, 1.2 million Americans are impacted by HIV/AIDS including 98,000 Floridians. In the past 30 years and since its discovery, 30 million lives have been claimed by this devastating disease.

“Drugs can control HIV in infected individuals. However, patients have to take these drugs all their lives. The only way to stop this is by completely eradicating HIV from the place where it is hiding during drug treatment,” said Rafick-Pierre Sékaly, Ph.D. “This objective cannot be reached by one or two laboratories but requires collaboration among several sectors of the biomedical research industry including corporate partners.”

“HIV continues to kill millions of people in developing countries, including many regions of Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Our hope is to have a single, or more likely, a combination regimen that truly cures the disease and that we could eventually deliver to people infected with HIV throughout the world,” said Steven Deeks, M.D.

“Our group at VGTI FL has identified new mechanisms that allow HIV to persist in the human body. This grant will enable us to find a way to expunge the virus from its hideout,” said Dr. Nicolas Chomont, Assistant Member at VGTI FL.

“Marty Delaney, who died of liver cancer in 2009, was a friend of mine and a hero,” said co-principal investigator, Joseph (“Mike”) McCune, M.D., Ph.D. “Starting in the darkest days of the epidemic, when he founded Project Inform, and throughout the next 25 years, he was one of the most influential and thoughtful leaders in the struggle against HIV, helping researchers to work together and spearheading efforts to get better therapies to patients. Unlocking the secret of how to cure HIV would be a fitting tribute to his legacy.”

The research team includes collaborators from Johns Hopkins University; the Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU); the Oregon National Primate Research Center at OHSU; the University of Minnesota; Monash University; the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR); the Blood Systems Research Institute; the Karolinska Institute; the University of Miami; and the University of California, Davis. Merck Research Labs is the team’s industry partner, although Merck will not be receiving any funding for its participation in the project.

The UCSF Division of Experimental Medicine and the UCSF Division of HIV/AIDS at SFGH are affiliated with the [AIDS Research Institute \(ARI\) at UCSF](#). UCSF ARI houses hundreds of scientists and dozens of programs throughout UCSF and affiliated labs and institutions, making ARI one of the largest AIDS research entities in the world.

[UCSF](#) is a leading university dedicated to defining health worldwide through advanced biomedical research, graduate level education in the life sciences and health professions and excellence in patient care.

[VGTI FL](#) is an independent 501(c) 3 nonprofit research organization in Port St. Lucie, Fla. that focuses on studying the human immune system to prevent and treat chronic infectious diseases, cancer and ailments that disproportionately affect aging populations. VGTI Florida is related to the Vaccine and Gene Therapy Institute at Oregon Health & Science University in Beaverton, Ore.

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