Endowed Professorship Will Advance Molecular Cardiovascular Research

Carol Gregorio, PhD, director of the Molecular Cardiovascular Research Program and head of the Department of Cellular and Molecular Medicine at the UA College of Medicine, has been named the Luxford/Schoolcraft Endowed Professor of Cardiovascular Disease Research. Dr. Gregorio also is a co-director of the University of Arizona Sarver Heart Center.

As a basic scientist, she has a special research interest in the contractile proteins of heart muscle in health and disease. Not only has she made major contributions to the understanding of heart muscle abnormalities, she also has been an integral part of the UA College of Medicine’s and Sarver Heart Center’s goal to strengthen its translational research. “It’s important to understand that discoveries made in the laboratory are inspired by clinically relevant questions that challenge scientists to identify mechanisms so that we can improve how we address human disease,” says Dr. Gregorio.

Dr. Gregorio’s laboratory research is focused on identifying the components and molecular mechanisms regulating actin architecture in cardiac and skeletal muscle during normal development and disease. Actin...
The UA Sarver Heart Center is excited to welcome new members and announce enhanced leadership to propel our vision of a future free of heart and vascular disease.

In this issue we announce the addition of two new Sarver Heart Center co-directors: Dr. Karl B. Kern and Dr. Robert S. Poston. In joining Dr. Carol Gregorio, the co-directors provide strengths in cardiology, cardiovascular surgery and basic cardiovascular research.

We appreciate the many years of leadership provided by Humberto Lopez as chair of our advisory board and are pleased to announce that Kalidas Madhavpeddi of Phoenix is now our advisory board chair.

The Sarver Heart Center is delighted to acknowledge endowments that support our research and educational programs. The first is the appointment of Dr. Gregorio as the Luxford/Schoolcraft Endowed Professor of Cardiovascular Disease Research. Next we honor Dr. William Roeske as the next recipient of the Allan C. Hudson and Helen Lovaas Endowed Chair of Cardiovascular Imaging.

Our congratulations go to Dr. Frank I. Marcus for being honored nationally and internationally for his pioneering research in cardiac arrhythmias. Dr. Marcus is the world’s authority on Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricular Dysplasia/Cardiomyopathy—a rare disease that if undiagnosed can lead to cardiac arrest.

And, speaking of cardiac arrest, it was gratifying to see that Reader’s Digest listed chest-compression-only CPR as No. 1 on its list of the 15 greatest medical advances in 2010. And the Arizona Medical Association honored the UA Sarver Heart Center and the statewide SHARE program with its public health award for our research and advocacy of this life-saving technique. Perhaps even more special was an additional award from emergency responders in Flagstaff who are recording more and more “saves” using the resuscitation protocols developed here at the UA Sarver Heart Center. Dr. Ben Bobrow and I accepted this award on behalf of all the members of the Resuscitation Research Group.

Thanks to the generosity of UA Sarver Heart Center supporters, we were able to award $203,000 in funding for research grants to our members. Such support is critical to our effort as these start-up funds enable our scientists to obtain preliminary research results that are necessary to compete for national funding. Such research is needed to bring us closer to a future free of heart disease and stroke.

GORDON A. EWY, MD
Director, UA Sarver Heart Center
is an indispensable protein and a major component of heart muscle. Changes in actin, caused by genetic mutations that have been identified in humans, are a frequent cause of cardiomyopathies. Her research team is determining how genetic defects in this protein affect muscle force generation and muscle contraction, a state that leads to heart failure and may lead to sudden cardiac death.

“We are very excited about the progress that our basic scientists have made under Carol’s leadership. She has helped direct the UA Sarver Heart Center’s support of promising pilot studies that have led to national funding for their research studies–important in achieving our vision of a future free of heart disease and stroke,” says Gordon A. Ewy, MD, director of the Sarver Heart Center.

“I’m extremely grateful for the generosity and vision of the Luxford and Schoolcraft families. This endowed professorship will enable our laboratory to initiate novel projects related to heart development, heart failure and sudden cardiac death that otherwise would not be possible,” says Dr. Gregorio.

Robert and Betty Luxford were long-standing supporters of science and promoting philanthropic investment of scholarships through the ARCS (Achievement Rewards for College Scientists) Foundation–Phoenix Chapter. After visiting the UA Sarver Heart Center, as part of an ARCS’ tour, the Luxfords made the generous and thoughtful decision to include the Sarver Heart Center in their estate plan.

In early 2009, Mr. Carlton D. Schoolcraft sent a letter to Dr. Ewy stating that he and his wife, Virginia, had admired the work of the Center and Dr. Ewy for many years. While not patients of Dr. Ewy’s, the Schoolcrafts were compelled to improve the lives of those suffering from cardiovascular disease through a very generous estate provision.

“We are honored by gifts such as these. People like Mr. and Mrs. Luxford, and Mr. and Mrs. Schoolcraft have entrusted us with their legacies. This is not something we take lightly or for granted. To be able to name a fund after these individuals will help to remind each of us that we can continue to make a major difference. Endowments to the UA Foundation for the Sarver Heart Center provide support in perpetuity,” says Dr. Ewy.

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The precise assembly and structure of filaments in heart muscle sarcomeres (single contractile units) are pivotal for efficient heart beats. It is the sliding of the filaments that drives muscle contraction. Mutations in these essential components often result in cardiomyopathy, a focus of the Gregorio laboratory.