UCSF Research at SFGH

The UCSF research programs at San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center (SFGH) are essential to the hospital’s success in providing top quality care, delivering an outstanding teaching program and serving the community’s needs. The research at SFGH focuses on the hospital’s patients; often include the City’s most vulnerable populations. Our patients benefit in real time from the best that medical science has to offer.

SFGH is the city’s only trauma center. That life-saving work is supported by cutting edge research in areas such as stroke, seizures and traumatic brain injury. SFGH is stroke-certified and in 2011 became the first hospital in the country to be certified for a Traumatic Brain Injury Program. Research and care go hand in hand to bring the best of today’s science to our patients.

UCSF and SFGH together attract physician scientists committed to medical advancement who are leaders in their medical and surgical specialties. The research programs at SFGH were awarded $160 million in 2012, much of it from the National Institutes of Health. UCSF research at SFGH runs the entire gamut from basic science to clinical trials of emerging treatment. Patients benefit from real-time application of “bench to bedside” research.

Pioneering HIV/AIDS Research at SFGH

The research conducted at SFGH by UCSF physician-researchers has lead to many important breakthroughs in the area of HIV/AIDS, including:

- The first cases of HIV were seen and documented at SFGH in 1981.
- The first ever AIDS research grant was awarded to people at SFGH to study outbreaks of Kaposi Sarcoma, an AIDS related skin cancer.
- The first dedicated outpatient clinic and inpatient clinic for HIV/AIDS opened at SFGH in 1983.
- Researchers at SFGH lead clinical trials for AZT in 1987, the first medication approved for the treatment of HIV.
- In 1996, SFGH investigators played a key role in the development of combination anti-retroviral therapy that changed HIV from a fatal to a chronic disease.
- SFGH leaders, in 2002, helped design World Health Organization guidelines to deploy antiretroviral therapy around the world.
- In 2010, SFGH-based physician leaders established the first policy to treat all persons diagnosed with HIV.
- Researchers at the Department of Experimental Medicine are the first to evaluate pro-inflammatory responses to HIV as a potential cause for disease progression and the first to discover that T cell responses to human endogenous retroviruses are an important aspect of HIV infection.
UCSF Research Programs

Examples of the UCSF-SFGH research programs include:

- Orthopaedic Trauma Institute
- Brain and Spinal Injury Center
- Positive Health Program/Ward 86 (HIV/AIDS)
- Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health
- Center for Vulnerable Populations
- Child Trauma Research Project
- Curry Institute (tuberculosis)
- Injury Prevention Center
- Wraparound Project (anti-violence program for trauma patients)
- Latino Mental Health Research Program

More Discoveries

Research conducted at SFGH has resulted in several “firsts” and discoveries, including in the areas of:

Effects of smoking and nicotine: Dr. Neal Benowitz conducted meticulous studies of the effects of smoking and nicotine. His observations and work with the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), the Surgeon General and the Institute of Medicine (part of the National Academy of Sciences) have played a major role in development of public health policy.

Adrenal gland: Dr. Edward Biglieri was a pioneer in establishing the role of adrenal gland hormones as a cause of high blood pressure, including the first description of an entirely novel defect in adrenal hormone biosynthesis, Biglieri Syndrome.

Fetal Immune System: Researchers at the Department of Experimental Medicine are the first to demonstrate that the human fetal immune system develops from a stem cell different than the adult immune system.

Reproductive Health: The Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health has lead or participated in research on every major form of contraception, including the hormone-releasing skin patch and emergency contraception.

Health Outcomes: Dr. Dean Schillinger’s work on literacy and health outcome has confirmed that patient health is improved when the patient understands what the health care providers is saying and the directions for treatment.

Tuberculosis: Through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Global Health Fund, Dr. Philip Hopewell leads the international effort to standardize tuberculosis treatment protocol worldwide in an effort to reduce drug resistant tuberculosis and work toward elimination of the disease.

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