



MORE INFORMATION

Hilary DeMillo, Arkansas Children's

(501) 416-7981 (mobile)

(501) 364-6445 (office)

demillohh@archildrens.org

Andrea Peel, UAMS

(501) 351-7903 (mobile)

(501) 686-8996 (office)

andrea@uams.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NIH Awards \$11.5 Million to Arkansas Children's Research Institute to Establish Unique Pediatric Research Center

LITTLE ROCK, AR. (July 12, 2017) – The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has awarded \$11.5 million to the Arkansas Children's Research Institute (ACRI) to develop the Center for Translational Pediatric Research (CTPR). The award is the largest-ever grant award that ACRI has received from NIH. Under the direction of Alan Tackett, PhD, the center will result in new treatments and therapies developed specifically for children.

Dr. Tackett, an ACRI expert in systems biology, is the Scharlau Family Endowed Professor of Cancer Research and a professor of Biochemistry, Pediatrics and Pathology at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

The Center for Translational Pediatric Research at ACRI will use state-of-the-art technology and a systems biology approach to study how pediatric diseases develop, with the ultimate goal of identifying points in the intersection of disease and development that will produce targets for therapeutic intervention and the development of new treatments for children.

Systems biology is a holistic approach that enables researchers to simultaneously study all of the events occurring in a cell that are leading to a particular outcome or disease.

"Historically, science has answered one question at a time," Dr. Tackett said. "By employing a more comprehensive systems biology approach, we can ask many questions at the same time, which allows us to more quickly understand the fundamental reasons that a disease is occurring and how to more specifically develop treatments."

"To my knowledge, there is not a pediatric research center in the U.S. and probably in the world that focuses on utilizing these specific approaches. In that way, we are uniquely positioned to develop ways to improve children's health in Arkansas and our nation."

The NIH Institutional Development Award (IDeA) program will fund the CTPR as one of NIH's prestigious Centers of Biological Research Excellence (COBRE). These grants create world-class research environments for young faculty who are identified as the next generation of excellence in research. The awards focus on building research in states that have historically had low levels of NIH funding. This first phase of COBRE funding will start in July of 2017 and last five years. A total of 15 years of funding is available through this federal program, and Tackett's award is the second COBRE grant ACRI has received from NIH in the last year.

"This award is a promise to the children of Arkansas that we will create a healthier tomorrow specifically for them," said Gregory Kearns, PharmD, PhD, FAAP, president of ACRI and Arkansas Children's senior vice president/chief research officer. He is also the Ross & Mary Whipple Family Distinguished Research Scientist Endowed Chair and a professor of Pediatrics at UAMS. "NIH sees that we have the potential to create a transformational center that will improve children's lives directly where they live, learn and play."

Dr. Tackett will serve as director of the CTPR and Sonet Weed, MS, will oversee the administration of the grant. The junior faculty that were selected to seed this center include:

- Jason Farrar, UAMS assistant professor of Pediatrics
- Xiawei Ou, PhD, UAMS assistant professor of Radiology and Pediatrics
- Laxmi Yeruva, PhD, UAMS assistant professor of Pediatrics
- Boris Zybailov, PhD, UAMS assistant professor of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

Their research focuses on pediatric blood disorders, infant brain development in obese mothers, immune system development in breastfed infants, and pediatric chronic kidney disease – respectively.

All-in-all, the Center for Translational Pediatric Research will support 30 faculty – making it one of the largest centers of its kind. Located at ACRI, the CTPR will also partner with the Arkansas Children's Nutrition Center and UAMS and its Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute. The cutting-edge research technology investment will create discoveries in proteomics, genomics, and bioinformatics – overseen by:

- Rick Emondson, PhD, UAMS associate professor of Medicine
- Samuel Mackintosh, PhD, UAMS research assistant professor of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology
- Stewart MacLeod, PhD, UAMS assistant professor of Pediatrics
- Stephanie Byrum, PhD, UAMS research assistant professor of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology
- Galina Glazko, PhD, UAMS assistant professor of Biomedical Informatics

Arkansas Children's, Inc. is the only health system in the state solely dedicated to caring for children, which allows the organization to uniquely shape the landscape of pediatric care in Arkansas. The system includes a 359-bed hospital in Little Rock with the state's only pediatric Level 1 trauma center, burn center, Level 4 neonatal intensive care and pediatric intensive care, and research institute as well as a nationally-recognized transport service. It is one of the 25 largest children's hospitals in the United States and is nationally ranked by U.S. News World & Report in pulmonology and neonatal care. A sister campus is under development in Northwest Arkansas and will bring 233,613 square feet of inpatient beds, emergency care, clinic rooms and diagnostic services to children in that corner of the state. Arkansas Children's also blankets the state with outreach programs that include telemedicine, mobile health, and school-based health solutions. A private not-for-profit, Arkansas Children's boasts

an internationally renowned reputation for medical breakthroughs and intensive treatments, unique surgical procedures and forward-thinking research and is committed to providing every child with access to the best care available, regardless of location or resources. Founded as an orphanage, Arkansas Children's has championed children by making them better today and healthier tomorrow for more than 100 years. For more info, visit archildrens.org.

ACRI is a free-standing state-of-the-art pediatric research center which provides a research environment on the ACH campus to foster research and scholarship of faculty members of University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences who are investigating questions relative to development, disease and treatment as it relates to the health of infants, children and adolescents. Physician and biomedical scientist investigators at ACRI and the Arkansas Children's Nutrition Center (ACNC) conduct clinical, basic science, and health services research for the purpose of treating illnesses and preventing disease and thereby, improving the health of the children of Arkansas and beyond.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a northwest Arkansas regional campus; a statewide network of regional centers; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, the Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, the Myeloma Institute, the Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, the Psychiatric Research Institute, the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging and the Translational Research Institute. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 2,870 students, 799 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including about 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS and its regional campuses throughout the state, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or uamshealth.com. Find us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Instagram.

#