

## **NINDS awards new Udall Centers for Parkinson's Disease Research**

EurekAlert

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), a component of the National Institutes of Health, has established two new sites as part of the Morris K. Udall Centers of Excellence in Parkinson's Disease Research. The NINDS grants will provide a five-year investment totaling more than \$16 million for Emory University in Atlanta and the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research in Manhasset, N.Y.

NINDS Director Story Landis, Ph.D., announced the awards today at the World Parkinson Congress in Glasgow, Scotland. The congress is an international, interdisciplinary forum designed to showcase the latest developments in the world of Parkinson's disease, featuring a network of scientists, clinicians, patients, caregivers and allied health professionals from 66 countries.

"For more than a decade, the Udall Centers of Excellence have represented our commitment to bring together the talent and effort of the foremost investigators advancing research in Parkinson's disease," said Dr. Landis. "I look forward to these new centers partnering with us to accelerate basic, translational and clinical research to find a cure for this devastating illness."

Parkinson's disease is a degenerative disorder that attacks neurons in the substantia nigra, a part of the brain that controls movement. Symptoms include involuntary shaking, stiffened muscles and impaired balance. Although certain drugs, such as levodopa, can reduce Parkinson's disease symptoms, there is no proven method to slow its progressive course.

With the new centers announced today, NINDS is supporting 11 Udall Centers of Excellence across the United States. The grants provide funding for a wide range of independent and collaborative projects. These include genetic and genomic studies, research to pinpoint the disease's underlying mechanisms, work to improve animal models, the development and testing of potential therapeutics, and clinical research with Parkinson's disease patients. The NINDS launched the network in 1997. The Udall Centers are named in honor of U.S. Rep. Morris K. Udall (D-Ariz.), who died in 1998 after a long battle with Parkinson's disease.

Thomas Wichmann, M.D., professor of neurology at Emory University, will direct the new Udall Center. One of its objectives is to enhance collaboration between basic scientists with the university's clinical movement disorders group, which works with Parkinson's disease patients in the Atlanta region. The program will bring together experts in electrophysiology, pharmacology and related disciplines investigating brain circuits disrupted by Parkinson's disease and the effects of treating them with pharmacological and surgical therapy. The center also will include a research

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component at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. "Our goal is to increase understanding of how existing therapies work, and develop and explore the mechanisms of action of new antiparkinsonian treatments," said Dr. Wichmann.

The director of the new Udall Center at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research is David Eidelberg, M.D., a pioneer in the use of functional brain imaging and network analysis for the study of neurodegenerative diseases and Parkinson's disease. The new center will focus on working with patients who suffer serious clinical side effects from levodopa and examining individual differences in the cognitive response to treatment.

"Understanding these phenomena should not only help improve the lives of patients, but also provide unique insight into the pathophysiology of Parkinson's disease and its treatment," said Dr. Eidelberg. He added that the center will work toward validating a novel method for imaging brain circuits to aid early diagnosis, which could help streamline trials of new therapies for Parkinson's disease as well as for atypical parkinsonian syndromes.

NINDS program director Beth-Anne Sieber, Ph.D., said, "By virtue of cutting-edge, collaborative research approaches, the Udall Centers of Excellence are uniquely poised to advance scientific discovery toward improved understanding of this disease, as well as treatment of people with Parkinson's disease. We look forward to working with the Emory, Feinstein and other Udall Centers on these important goals."

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