September 30, 2011

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center has received a five-year, $27.5 million Cancer Center Support Grant from the National Cancer Institute to renew support for its cancer research program through 2016. The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center will receive more than $5.4 million per year to support six research programs, plus 14 shared facilities and services.

The Cancer Center Support Grant is the most prestigious federal grant that can be earned by an institution with significant cancer research and patient-care programs. The renewal also extends UAB's elite "comprehensive" designation, which is characterized by scientific excellence and the ability to integrate diverse research approaches in the fight against cancer.

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center is one of the original NCI-designated centers created when President Richard Nixon signed the National Cancer Act in 1971; it is one of only 40 NCI-designated comprehensive cancer centers in the United States, and the only one in Alabama and the Deep South region.

Additionally, the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center received a new Specialized Program of Research Excellence grant in brain cancer for $2.3 million from the National Institutes of Health to develop new therapies to treat brain tumors. UAB is one of few centers in the United States with four SPORE programs — brain, breast and pancreatic cancers, and a shared grant with Johns Hopkins for cervical cancer.

“This truly is a transformative time for the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center,” says Director Edward Partridge, M.D. “With this renewal and a new state-of-the-art research facility soon to be completed, we are in a position to advance cancer knowledge even further and provide world-class specialized cancer care to our patients. We’ve undergone a rigorous renewal process, and at a time when funding is extremely limited this grant fuels our efforts in cancer prevention and treatment.”

The NCI requires comprehensive cancer centers to demonstrate depth and breadth in laboratory, clinical and population-based research, with programs that bridge all three areas. A comprehensive cancer center also must provide outreach, education and information on cancer to the community. To maintain NCI-designated comprehensive status, each institution must undergo an intensive and rigorous review of these programs by an NCI site team every five years.

During this most recent review, the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center received an excellent rating during the highly competitive, peer-reviewed selection process and was recognized for the special emphasis it places on cancer health disparities and translational therapeutics — the ability to move research findings from the laboratory bench to the patient bedside.

“This NCI renewal grant validates the value of the innovative work that we are conducting at UAB,” says Ray L. Watts, M.D., senior vice president for Medicine and dean of the UAB School of Medicine

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“It is a direct testament to our team of 350 scientists and physicians who are working every day to address all aspects of cancer, from understanding how it begins, to developing new treatments to prevent and conquer the disease and testing them in clinical trials, to providing exceptional patient care and support to patients and their families.”

A world leader in developing innovative monoclonal antibody approaches to cancer therapy, the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center conducts clinical trials using engineered monoclonal antibodies alone or armed with a payload of immunotoxins, chemotherapy drugs or radioactive isotopes to specifically target a broad array of cancers, including breast, gastrointestinal tract, lung, ovary, head and neck, brain tumors and lymphomas.

In recent years, UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center researchers have made several exciting breakthroughs:

--Identifying a genetic link between obesity and colon cancer risk

--Setting the standard of care for head-and-neck cancer treatment

--Reversing health disparities with breast-cancer screening among under-served populations in Alabama and Mississippi

--Discovering a set of four biomarkers that help predict the likelihood patients will develop aggressive colorectal cancer

--Conducting first stages of Phase I trials in humans using UAB-30, a cancer-fighting retinoid that was engineered at UAB

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center is among the 40 cancer centers in the nation to meet the stringent criteria for the National Cancer Institute's comprehensive designation. The center is a leader in groundbreaking research, reducing cancer disparities and leading-edge patient care.