

RESEARCH NOTES

Dental postdoc receives NIH award

Ariadne Letra, a postdoctoral associate in the lab of Alexandre Vieira, has received a five-year, \$586,725 National Institutes of Health Pathway to Independence program award.

The awards are given to support the transition to an independent position. Letra's project will explore the associations between metalloproteinase gene variants and cleft lip and palate.

Letra is mentored by Vieira and Mary L. Marazita of the School of Dental Medicine.

Group programs can cut risk of diabetes

Participation in a group program focused on weight loss and exercise helped adults in an urban, medically underserved community decrease their risk for Type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease, a study by University of Pittsburgh Diabetes Institute (UPDI) researchers found.

Their work appears in this month's issue of *Diabetes Care*.

The study was based on the successful national diabetes prevention program (DPP), which found that moderate weight loss and increased physical activity were more successful than medication in preventing diabetes and heart disease in people at risk for these diseases.

Researchers transformed DPP from an individually delivered

and UPDI's Linda M. Siminerio and Gretchen A. Piatt.

DPW funds startup of autism clinic

UPMC has received \$250,000 in funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Bureau of Autism Services to support the start-up of an Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network (ATN) site, which will offer comprehensive diagnosis, treatment, care and counseling for children and teens with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

The ATN is a group of 15 hospitals and medical centers in the United States and Canada dedicated to improving and standardizing medical care for children and adolescents with ASD.

The group's approach includes collaboration among specialists in neurology, developmental pediatrics, child psychiatry, psychology, gastroenterology, genetics, metabolic disorders and sleep disorders, among other disciplines.

The network aims to develop common clinical standards for medical care for individuals with ASD and to increase the pool of autism medical specialists through trainee mentorship and outreach to community-based physicians.

As part of this effort, families receiving care at the sites can participate in a data registry that tracks children and adolescents receiving care. The information in the database is a crucial part of developing the evidence to create and substantiate clinical consensus standards

of Biological Chemistry.

Phosphorylation (the addition of a phosphate group to a specific amino acid in a protein) of cardiac proteins is one chemical modulation discovered several decades ago to affect cardiac contraction.

Shroff and his fellow researchers have found another pathway that appears to be equally powerful in regulating cardiac muscle contraction — acetylation (the addition of an acetyl group to a specific amino acid in a protein) of cardiac proteins.

"Although protein acetylation has been studied for a long time, the focus so far has been on its action inside of nucleus (related to gene transcriptional control). Nobody had reported its actions on cardiac muscle contraction," Shroff said. "If the story we report in this article holds up under more realistic (physiological) conditions, then I am confident that this will open up a whole new area of research, including new therapeutic drugs for treating weakened cardiac muscle."

Stephen H. Smith, a research assistant in Shroff's lab, and colleagues from the University of Chicago co-authored the work.

**ACS research award granted**

The American Cancer Society, Inc. has granted the University a \$400,000, five-year clinical research professor award to support Jennifer R. Grandis, vice chair of research in the School of Medicine's Department of Otolaryngology.

Grandis will be known as the American Cancer Society-Genentech BioOncology Clinical Research Professor in Translational Research. The award will begin July 1.

Pitt shares in defense dept.'s MURI funding

Researchers Jeremy Levy and Michael Lewis will share in a combined \$2.7 million in research funds from the U.S. Department of Defense Multidisciplinary University Research Initiative (MURI) program. MURI, which supports basic research of interest to the defense department, will devote \$200 million over the next five years (including \$19.7 million in fiscal year 2008) to 34 projects involving 64 universities. Three projects involve Pitt.

Levy, a professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy, was awarded \$1.1 million as part of a five-year, \$6.5 million project to investigate future applications of

electron spin, which may allow for faster and less power-consuming information technology. He will collaborate with researchers from four other universities to apply electron spin to organic semiconductors and other materials in an attempt to create devices that can store and transfer information with more density but by using less power.

Levy will use state-of-the-art optical and scanning probe techniques to investigate the properties of materials fabricated by his colleagues at the University of Iowa, the University of California-Berkeley and New York University. Theoretical support will come from researchers at Iowa and the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Lewis, a professor in the School of Information Sciences who specializes in human interaction with and through computers and machines, will receive a total of nearly \$1.5 million for two MURI projects totaling \$13.75 million.

One will evaluate the feasibility of a decentralized military communication system; another is meant to help military negotiators better cooperate with people of different cultures.

Lewis will receive almost \$600,000 to create methods for observing how cultural differ-

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Damage Associated Molecular Pattern