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EFFECTIVE MENTORING CRITICAL TO HIV/AIDS RESEARCH EFFORTS

An innovative mentoring program at the UCSF-Gladstone Institute for Virology and Immunology Center for AIDS Research is providing vital support for the development of the next generation of HIV/AIDS researchers and clinician scientists.

Described in an article published in the *American Journal for Public Health* appearing February 26 in the First Look section of the AJPH website, the program focuses on overcoming challenges faced by early-career investigators through several novel mechanisms.

“One key innovation adopted in our program is ‘trans’ mentoring. In this model, a mentee is paired with a mentor from a research discipline different from the mentee’s. For instance, a mentee working in basic science is paired with a mentor who is doing either clinical or behavioral research. One advantage is to lessen potential conflicts of interest between mentee and mentor. Additionally, an important benefit in that it strongly encourages multidisciplinary research,” said the article’s co-author James S. Kahn, MD, UCSF professor of clinical medicine and co-director of the UCSF-GIVI CFAR’s mentoring program.

One of the goals of the CFAR mentoring program is to support and create pathways for multidisciplinary HIV research. The three broad categories that mentors and mentees are divided into are basic research, clinical or translational research, and population or behavioral research.

Another significant innovation in the CFAR program lies in considering the role of the mentor.

“In the past, senior investigators mentored junior researchers without really considering what was necessary for successful mentoring. Our concept is that mentoring is a teachable skill. We focus on and help develop the specific skill set needed by a mentor to best assist an early-career investigator,” said Kahn.

Open mentoring is an innovation that the CFAR mentoring program uses to support its goal of retaining early-career investigators and optimizing their productivity. Open mentoring is a strategy that provides mentoring to persons desiring mentoring and is contrasted with elite mentoring in which mentoring is provided to those investigators who have achieved early success.

“Deciding to reserve mentoring for the top strata of early-career researchers does not broaden the pool of investigators. By making mentoring open to any investigator doing HIV research, we find that we are providing career support to a more diverse group of individuals from a more diverse set of research disciplines,” said the article’s co-author, Ruth M. Greenblatt, MD, UCSF

professor of clinical medicine and co-director of the CFAR mentoring program.

The authors note other goals of the mentoring program, including retaining early-career investigators and optimizing their productivity and assisting them with transitions as their careers progress.

“The National Institutes of Health is limiting grant resubmissions due to funding constraints. Our mentors assist in optimizing grant submissions and ensuring mentees have a strong career strategy with appropriate expectations. Moreover, mentoring can be extremely helpful in assisting early-career investigators with the complicated but essential balancing of personal time with career advancement,” said Greenblatt.

Greenblatt observed that the NIH has placed particular emphasis on the challenges faced by clinician scientists and noted that the country risks losing an entire generation of these essential investigators.

“We hear similar concerns from clinician scientists. They mention lack of access to funding, lack of caring for them as individuals and lack of a collegial atmosphere. Our mentoring serves as an intervention to specifically address these problems,” said Greenblatt.

Funding for the UCSF-GIVI CFAR is provided by the National Institutes of Health.

UCSF-Gladstone Institute for Virology and Immunology CFAR is a multi-disciplinary, multi-campus program focused on translational HIV/AIDS research. CFAR’s mission is to support a multidisciplinary environment that promotes basic, clinical, epidemiologic, behavioral and translational research in the prevention, detection and treatment of HIV infection and AIDS, while expanding the intersections of research between those scientific disciplines.

The J. David Gladstone Institutes, an independent, non-profit biomedical research organization affiliated with the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), are dedicated to the health and welfare of humankind through research into the causes and prevention of some of the world's most devastating diseases. Gladstone is comprised of the Gladstone Institute of Cardiovascular Disease, the Gladstone Institute of Virology and Immunology and the Gladstone Institute of Neurological Disease.

UCSF-GIVI CFAR is affiliated with the AIDS Research Institute at UCSF. UCSF ARI houses hundreds of scientists and dozens of programs throughout UCSF and affiliated labs and institutions, making ARI one of the largest AIDS research entities in the world.

UCSF is a leading university dedicated to defining health worldwide through advanced biomedical research, graduate level education in the life sciences and health professions, and excellence in patient care.

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