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Medical Center

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Recovery Act Supports Research on Recovery from Methamphetamine Addiction
Grant Awarded to California Pacific Medical Center Researchers

San Francisco, CA, November 5, 2009 – Keith Flower, M.D., a research physician at the Addiction Pharmacology & Research Laboratory in San Francisco, has been awarded a grant to investigate a new medication treatment for methamphetamine addiction. This grant has been awarded to California Pacific Medical Center’s Research Institute through President Barack Obama’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Methamphetamine is a highly addictive stimulant that goes by the street names “crank,” “crystal meth” and “speed.” It can cause heart disease, brain damage, memory problems, distorted thinking, paranoia, aggression, and violent behavior. Methamphetamine use puts people at increased risk for infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

Methamphetamine abuse continues at epidemic levels in the San Francisco Bay Area. It costs the U.S. more than \$20 billion each year and presents significant challenges to public health, law enforcement, and families. The National Institutes of Health – working with research labs like the Addiction Pharmacology & Research Laboratory – is urgently seeking improved treatments for this growing problem.

One of the emerging medications for treating methamphetamine addiction is naltrexone, an FDA-approved treatment for heroin and alcohol dependence. Dr. Flower’s goal is to learn whether naltrexone is safe and effective as a treatment for methamphetamine addiction.

Genetic research has given rise to the hope of personalized medicine: the idea that each person’s genes can reveal the best treatment for them. Naltrexone may be one of the first examples of this approach. Naltrexone works by blocking opiate receptors in the brain. Blocking opiate receptors blocks craving. There are different genetic versions of these receptors. Two versions are A118A and A118G. Alcoholics who have the A118G version are helped more by naltrexone; so might methamphetamine users.

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“We know that methamphetamine exerts powerful effects on the brain’s reward pathways,” explains Dr. Flower. “Although methamphetamine can feel good when people start using it, they may lose control and begin a downward spiral that they cannot be able to pull out of without help. Counseling works but is sometimes not enough, so we look for medications that will break this cycle.”

“Naltrexone decreases the pleasurable, rewarding effects of alcohol. We know that alcoholics with the A118G version of the opiate receptor are helped more by naltrexone, and we also know that naltrexone blocks the effects of amphetamine and helps amphetamine users quit. Our goal is to put these facts together to see if naltrexone will help methamphetamine users who have the A118G version of the opiate receptor,” says Flower.

About the Addiction & Pharmacology Research Laboratory

The Addiction & Pharmacology Research Laboratory uses the tools of psychology, pharmacology, and cognitive science to understand the impact of non-medical drug use on people and to try to find better treatments for addiction. They develop innovative methods for conducting clinical trials and measuring the effects of drugs on the human mind and body. Their research is primarily funded by the National Institutes of Health. The Laboratory is located at the St. Luke’s Campus of California Pacific Medical Center in the Mission District of San Francisco. For more information about their studies visit

<http://www.cpmc.org/professionals/research/trials/aprllisting.html>

California Pacific Medical Center. Beyond Medicine.

At San Francisco’s California Pacific Medical Center, we believe in the power of medicine. We research the most up-to-date treatments, hire the most qualified individuals, and practice the most modern, innovative medicine available. We deliver the highest quality expert care, with kindness and compassion, in acute, post-acute and outpatient services, as well as preventive and complementary medicine. But we also believe that medicine alone is only part of the solution. That’s why we look intently at each individual case and treat the whole person, not just the illness. It’s why we go beyond medical care and provide our patients with things like disease counseling, family support and wellness treatments. As one of California’s largest private, community-based, not-for-profit, teaching medical centers, and a Sutter Health affiliate, we are able to reach deep into our community to provide education, screening and financial support in some of the city’s most underserved neighborhoods. Medicine can transform a body. But going beyond medicine can transform a life. www.cpmc.org