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Venture Philanthropy takes on Glaucoma
Researchers from Outside Field to Search for a Cure in New Effort from Glaucoma Research Foundation and Kirsch Foundation

San Francisco/San Jose, CA –With dual goals of identifying what causes glaucoma and speeding progress toward discovering a cure, the Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation and the Glaucoma Research Foundation today announced the selection of four scientists for the Catalyst For a Cure – their nontraditional research consortium.

In an attempt to bring fresh perspective to glaucoma research, Catalyst For a Cure specifically chose four scientists working on cutting edge medical research – who don't work on eye diseases.

"The CFC project is unprecedented in the field of medical research," said Dr. Martin Wax, a member of the advisory board for CFC and a glaucoma specialist and Professor of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis. "It provides research funding to young, bright scientific minds based solely on their desire and ability to apply their scientific skills to the study of a specific disorder with which they were previously unfamiliar – in this case, glaucoma."

The Catalyst For a Cure scientists will use recent breakthroughs in neuroscience, molecular biology, genetics, and immunology as they work toward a cure for glaucoma. The debilitating eye disease affects at least 3 three million Americans, and is the leading cause of preventable blindness in the nation.

The four Investigators are:

David Calkins, Ph.D.

The University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester, New York

Philip Horner, Ph.D.

University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

Nicholas Marsh-Armstrong, Ph.D.

Kennedy-Krieger Institute/Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland

Monica Vetter, Ph.D.

University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

"Our goal is to make significant new progress in learning what causes glaucoma and what are the critical mechanisms that result in the onset of the disease," said Kathleen

Gwynn, President and CEO of the Kirsch Foundation. “The Catalyst project is a collective enterprise, with each scientist developing ideas, facilitating the others’ work, and supporting each others’ efforts. We expect great breakthroughs.”

Patrick Hines, President and CEO of the Glaucoma Research Foundation added: “This strategy will result in research activities that are truly effective and synergistic. By leveraging the resources of both foundations in this partnership, we expect to maximize the return on our mutual investment.”

The four scientists say that they are eager to begin working on the challenge ahead.

“Unraveling the mysteries of degenerative disease requires a multidisciplinary approach that could not be accomplished by any one particular laboratory,” said Philip Horner, Ph.D. of University of Washington, Seattle. “Catalyst for a Cure is a unique model for facilitating collaboration among laboratories with distinctive interests and technologies.”

“The great variety of skills and knowledge we bring to bear really encourages us to think “out of the box” or in ways that we, as individuals, may not be used to,” said David Calkins, Ph.D. (the University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester, N.Y.

“Glaucoma is a devastating problem that could be better understood by applying the tools of modern biology. I am very excited to be a part of the CFC consortium, and feel privileged to be able to work together with a group of talented neuroscientists to tackle this problem,” said Monica Vetter, Ph.D., University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

“CFC provides an opportunity to try a different model of doing science. This highly directed and interactive approach will benefit not only glaucoma research, but also all those who are involved in the project,” said Nicholas Marsh-Armstrong, Ph.D., Kennedy-Krieger Institute/Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

About the Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation

The Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation, located in San Jose, California, funds an extensive array of causes, ranging from curing major diseases to air quality improvements and other environmental issues, and from nuclear disarmament and political reform to support of Silicon Valley's nonprofit organizations. Approximately half of the Foundation's annual grant making is focused on medical and scientific research. Steve Kirsch, a successful high-tech entrepreneur, and his wife, Michele, have been active philanthropists for over a decade and established the Foundation in 1999. For more information, visit www.kirschfoundation.org.

About the Glaucoma Research Foundation (GRF)

The Glaucoma Research Foundation founded is a national, non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to protecting the sight and independence of people with glaucoma through research and education. Our goal is to cure glaucoma. GRF sponsors basic and clinical research in many areas. Our public education programs include a free quarterly newsletter Gleams, fact sheets on glaucoma and a booklet for people with glaucoma and their families, “Understanding and Living with Glaucoma”. The Glaucoma Research Foundation was founded in 1978 and is located in San Francisco. For more information, visit www.glaucoma.org

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