

Local foundation seeds world-class research

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South Florida is the epicenter for new HIV infections, said Campbell Foundation trustee Bill Venuti. To combat the disease, the Fort Lauderdale-based nonprofit recently awarded three area institutions grants of \$25,000 aimed at education, prevention and cure research.

"While many of our research funding [grants] go outside of Florida, there are labs right here conducting research projects that may have a deep, lasting impact on reducing HIV, not only in South Florida... but around the world," Venuti said.

The projects are timely and will directly affect people living with HIV, as well as those at a high risk of becoming infected and caregivers, said the foundation's executive director Ken Rapkin.

The Broward Health Comprehensive Care Center will use its \$25,000 grant to place high-risk, HIV-negative women on anti-HIV medication to prevent new infections.

"If you really want to eradicate this disease, then you have to look at the other side of the equation, and that is, how do we prevent people from getting infected in the first place," said grant recipient Farouk Meklat, Pharm D., who with Dr. Michael Sension will be conducting the study.



At Florida International University, Rahul Dev Jayant, Ph.D. with the Department of Immunology in the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, will be working toward the development of a single-dose formulation that can release antiretroviral drugs up to one month rather than one week.

Miami Center for AIDS Research at the University of Miami is creating a mentoring program to attract young investigators into the field of HIV research.

Dr. Maria L. Alcaide will lead the development of workshops that build mentor and mentee relationships to support the next generation of HIV scientists.

In addition, the Campbell Foundation granted \$75,000 to Dr. Theodoros Kelesidis, an infectious disease specialist at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California at Los Angeles.

The grant will be used to determine if novel antioxidants will improve the dysfunction of cells that contribute to premature aging, the fallout from antiretroviral therapy that can be effective.

Premature aging is a dire consequence of chronic HIV infection, Rapkin said.

"So this grant is very timely," he added. "Research has found that the aging process speeds up by about five years on average for those with HIV."

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