Three CU scientists named 2011 Boettcher Investigators [1]

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DENVER ? Three University of Colorado researchers have been named to the 2011 class of Boettcher Investigators in the Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Program. This is the second year for the program, which supports early career scientists in their work toward making discoveries that improve human health.

CU?s 2011 Boettcher Investigators are:

Zhe Chen, Ph.D., assistant research professor of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology at the University of Colorado Boulder, whose research focuses on axon guidance during neural development

Robert C. Doebele, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of medical oncology at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, whose research focuses on resistance mechanisms in oncogene-driven lung cancer

Jing H. Wang, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of immunology at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, whose research focuses on antibody production and genomic instability in B lymphocytes

Two researchers from Colorado State University complete this year?s class: John D. (Nick) Fisk, Ph.D., and Tingting Yao, Ph.D.

?Our board is very pleased to embark on the second year of this important program, assisting early career investigators in Colorado to continue their important research,? said Edward D. ?Ted? White III, chairman of the Boettcher Foundation Board of Trustees, who made today?s announcement.

Individual grant amounts for the research projects range from $200,000 to $300,000. CU?s allocation of $700,000 is the largest in the state; it will be divided among the three Boettcher Investigators. Grant amounts varied based on funding allocated to each institution. Per program guidelines, the minimum budget was required to be $200,000.

The Boettcher Foundation announced the creation of the Boettcher Investigators program in 2008, as the result of an innovative agreement among the Boettcher Foundation, the Webb-Waring Foundation for Biomedical Research and the University of Colorado. Through the program, Boettcher Foundation now invests more than $1 million each year into efforts to increase Colorado?s competitiveness in biomedical science.

?We've made every effort to ensure that the legacies of the Webb and Waring families live on in the discovery of new knowledge to improve human health and in the advancement of young scientists,? said Timothy W. Schultz, president and executive director of the Boettcher Foundation.

Early Career Investigators (ECIs) are faculty members who are four years or less from their first academic appointment at a research institution. Grants awarded by the Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Program support the work of promising ECIs in Colorado. Eligible investigators apply through a competitive process within their respective institution.

?Through this program, the Boettcher Foundation has been able to bring resources to an area where funds are currently lacking and where federal and private research programs provide limited support,? Schultz said. ?Early career investigators quite frequently have a difficult time securing a first opportunity at an independent research effort that will move them out of the laboratory of their mentors and onto their own new and exciting areas of discovery.?

Chen studies abnormalities in the formation and maintenance of neural connections, which are at the foundation of such diseases as Alzheimer?s, Parkinson?s, mental retardation and many others. Neuronal extensions, or axons, must navigate properly to reach correct targets during early human development and following injuries that damage neural connections.

?Future studies funded by the Boettcher Foundation Webb-Waring award will help advance our current understanding of how these axon guidance molecules normally function and how they contribute to the etiology of certain human disorders,? Chen said.

Doebele?s research in lung cancer aims to identify specific mechanisms of resistance to a new oral drug, crizotinib, which can inhibit tumor cells with certain abnormal genes.

?The ultimate goal is to extend survival in patients with lung cancer using personalized approaches to select novel drugs based on data from the individual cancer patient,? Doebele said.

Wang?s work addresses breakdowns in the immune system.

?We are interested in elucidating the molecular mechanisms that regulate an enzyme called activation-induced deaminase, or AID, targeting specificity and efficiency,? Wang said. ?We are also investigating how AID contributes to genomic instability and cancer development.? Better understanding of such mechanisms will increase knowledge of DNA alterations.

Both Doebele and Wang are members of the University of Colorado Cancer Center, the state?s only federally designated comprehensive cancer center. The CU Cancer Center, established in 1988, is funded by a five-year grant from the National Cancer Institute.

The investigators were selected by a systemwide review panel chaired by Ron Sokol, M.D.

?Research is an important focus for a great university,? said CU President Bruce Benson. ?These winners of Boettcher Foundation Webb-Waring grants are stellar examples of the breadth and depth of the biomedical research being conducted across our campuses.?

Chen, Doebele and Wang join CU?s 2010 Boettcher Investigators [1]: Robin Dowell, D.Sc., Gidon Felson, Ph.D., and Paul Jedklicka, M.D., Ph.d.

?The Boettcher Foundation wanted the Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Program to invest where the impact would be the most substantial: to fund excellence in people, to partner with the state?s research institutions on the implementation of the program and to further the Webb and Waring families? long tradition of commitment to science and human health,? Schultz said. ?The program enhances the mission of the Boettcher Foundation, which was created by a visionary and pioneering family to effectively assist, encourage and promote quality of life for the citizens of Colorado. It is with gratitude to these generous families that the Boettcher Foundation continues the Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Program that supports the important work of Boettcher Investigators.?

For more information about the BFWW program at CU, contact Enid Ablowitz atwebb-waring@cu.edu [2] or visit the Office of the President website at www.cu.edu/boettcher [3].

The University of Colorado is a premier public research university with four campuses: the University of Colorado Boulder, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, the University of Colorado Denver and the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. Some 58,000 students are pursuing academic degrees at CU. The National Science Foundation ranks CU seventh among public institutions in federal research expenditures in engineering and science. Academic prestige is marked by the university?s four Nobel laureates, seven MacArthur ?genius? Fellows, 18 alumni astronauts and 19 Rhodes Scholars. For more information about the entire CU system, and to access campus resources, go to www.cu.edu [4].

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