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Kenny Can Foundation donates \$50,000 to support brain tumor research at UT Southwestern

DALLAS – Aug. 30, 2011 – The Kenny Can Foundation has given UT Southwestern Medical Center \$50,000 to foster research into the deadliest and most aggressive form of brain cancer.

The gift will support the work of Dr. Elizabeth Maher, associate professor of neurology, and Dr. Ralph DeBerardinis, assistant professor of pediatrics, whose acclaimed research is helping to uncover new treatments for glioblastoma.

Established in memory of Kenny Dennis, a Brinker International executive who lost his own battle with glioblastoma in 2002, the Kenny Can Foundation has raised more than \$1 million to support brain cancer research and to provide assistance to people affected by the disease.

“When Kenny was first diagnosed, we had such an overwhelming show of love and support from all of his friends, the Dallas community, and so many different parts of the food service industry,” said Nancy Dennis, his widow and founder of the Kenny Can Foundation. “When Kenny passed away, instead of people giving generously to me, I wanted to channel that support toward finding a cure for glioblastoma.

“When we were first introduced to the team of doctors at UT Southwestern and they explained to us the work they are doing, we were just completely amazed. It’s unbelievable how this group is working together for one single cause: a cure.”

Groundbreaking research is already under way to understand how normal cells transform into cancer cells in the brain, a critical step in identifying ways to inactivate malignant brain tumors. Drs. Maher and DeBerardinis collaboratively are investigating the genotype and metabolic phenotypes in glioblastoma and whether tumor growth can be suppressed by targeting a metabolic pathway that allows cancer cells to grow in vivo.

“Our team is fully committed to winning the war against malignant brain tumors,” said Dr. Maher. “Although there currently is no curative treatment for glioblastoma, we are growing ever closer to finding a treatment that can diffuse the tumor and meaningfully prolong life. This is a special group of patients, whom Dr. DeBerardinis and I feel privileged to work with. We’re honored that Nancy Dennis and the Kenny Can Foundation have chosen to support our research in such a meaningful way.”

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Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky, president of UT Southwestern, said, “Our institution’s ability to establish and maintain exemplary programs depends to a significant degree upon the ongoing commitment of friends and supporters like the Kenny Can Foundation. We admire the spirit of this wonderful gift. This is a critical era in cancer research, and this heartfelt grant could not be more timely.”

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