UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER NEWS

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Cain Foundation gift supports research on age-related vision and hearing loss

DALLAS – Nov. 8, 2010 – The Cain Foundation of Austin has given a grant to UT Southwestern Medical Center to foster research into age-related vision and hearing loss.

This latest gift from the longtime medical center supporter will create the Lillian and James Cain Endowment in Vision Loss and the Lillian and James Cain Endowment in Hearing Loss. The gift was made in memory of Mr. Cain, former senior vice president of the foundation, and his wife.

Half of the gift will support research on hearing deficits and the use of cochlear implants as treatment. A cochlear implant is a small electronic device that provides a sense of sound for patients who have severe to profound hearing loss and are unable to hear or understand speech with hearing aids. Unlike a hearing aid, which amplifies sound, a cochlear implant takes sound and bypasses the outer, middle and inner ear, directly stimulating the hearing nerve fibers that lead to the brain. The cochlear implant system consists of two parts: an internal device that is surgically implanted into the inner ear and an external component consisting of a headset and speech processor, which is programmed to supply sound to the wearer.

"The extraordinarily generous gift from the Cain Foundation will provide critical funding for ongoing research in intracochlear electrode design," said Dr. Peter Roland, chairman of otolaryngology – head and neck surgery. "We believe improved electrode design will allow for preservation of residual hearing in cochlear implant recipients and will help make cochlear implant technology suitable for the treatment of high-frequency hearing loss, which is increasingly common in individuals older than 50."

The second portion of the gift will fund research into age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of blindness in people older than 60. AMD occurs when the macula – the central portion of the retina that is important for reading and color vision – becomes damaged. There is no cure for the disease, but early treatment can slow its progression.

"We have reached a point in ophthalmology where we can effectively diagnose AMD, even

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in its earliest stage of development," said Dr. James McCulley, chairman of ophthalmology. "We are now able not only to treat afflicted patients and slow the progression of the disease, but also to identify underlying genetic factors that predispose individuals to the development of AMD. This gives great hope for developing better treatments that may prevent or even reverse the blinding disease process."

Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky, president of UT Southwestern, said, "The Cain Foundation has been a tremendously loyal friend to the medical center and to the field of medicine for many years. This generous gift will endure as it continues to foster great advances in hearing and vision research, bettering the lives of the millions of people who deal with age-related challenges on a daily basis. The Cain Foundation's support of UT Southwestern is wonderful, and we're enormously thankful for its extraordinary gift."

The Cain Foundation has committed and donated significantly to the medical center since 1990.

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