

# Media Release



Meggen (Switzerland), 15 December 2007.

## Over 1.5 million Swiss Francs in RoFAR Special Grants awarded

In addition to the regular competition cycles in 2007, RoFAR re-extended an invitation to scientists and institutions to submit innovative proposals. Of special interest were studies providing proof-of-principle and/or have the potential for translation into clinical practice. RoFAR has awarded special grants to American investigator Tomas Ganz and Australian scientist Stephen Jane.

**Professor Tomas Ganz** and his co-investigators Drs. Seth Rivera and Elizabeta Nemeth of the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), United States, have been awarded a grant for a three-year project. The project aims to identify the mediators and pathways that regulate hepcidin as well as ferroportin during inflammation. Ganz plans to analyse the effect of inflammation on homeostatic regulation of hepcidin by iron and erythropoietic activity. The influence of sex hormones on hepcidin during inflammation will also be examined.

Ganz graduated from UCLA with a B.S. in physics, obtained a PhD degree in applied physics at the California Institute of Technology in 1976, and received his medical degree in 1978 at UCLA. He now serves as Professor of Medicine and Pathology at the same institution. According to one of the project reviewers, Ganz is “an important figure in the iron regulation field”; he has been doing extensive work on hepcidin, studying its role in anaemia of chronic disorders and its deficiency in most forms of haemochromatosis. The proposed research builds on an earlier RoFAR grant in which the tools were developed for the study of hepcidin regulation during inflammation.

The second grant was awarded to **Professor Stephen M. Jane** of the Bone Marrow Research Laboratories at The Royal Melbourne Hospital, Australia, and his co-investigator Dr Ian Street from the WEHI Biotechnology Centre. Their one-year project seeks to identify small molecule inhibitors of PRMT5 through a high throughput screen. The project also intends to prevent the down-regulation of foetal globin chain synthesis as a means of treating sickle cell anaemia and beta thalassaemia. “This is an ambitious project concerning a topic of great clinical significance for which the applicant has made some important preliminary observations”, one project reviewer commented.

Jane graduated from Monash University, Melbourne with a MB BS degree in medicine in 1981. In 1987, he received degrees in pathology and medicine at the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia and Royal Australasian College of Physicians, respectively. Jane earned his PhD degree in medicine in 1990 also from Monash University. He has been the Director of the Bone Marrow Research Laboratories, Royal Melbourne Hospital since 2006. A specialist on haemoglobin gene regulation, Jane has done extensive work on characterising the role of transcription factors in haemoglobin diseases but also in various other pathologies.

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**About the Roche Foundation for Anemia Research (RoFAR)**

RoFAR, an independent, scientist-led, and internationally active Medical Research Charity, administers an initial donation of 16 million CHF provided by F. Hoffmann-La Roche (Roche) in 2004. As a sign of Roche's long-term commitment to RoFAR, a further donation of 3 million Swiss Francs has been provided for 2008. The foundation is legally independent from Roche and is guided by a Board of eight Trustees and an independently appointed Scientific Advisory Board. RoFAR supports groundbreaking scientific work, both basic and clinical, investigating anaemia, erythropoietin and related topics, for example, hypoxia-sensing, the organ-protective role of erythropoietin, hepcidin and iron metabolism. To date, more than 11 million CHF (USD 9.9 million) have been awarded to 49 research projects around the world. Award winners, who receive grants of up to 200,000 CHF each, are currently exploring key scientific questions in nephrology, diabetology, haematology, oncology, ophthalmology, neurology and cardiology. Applications for RoFAR grants are sought bi-annually from established members of academic staff at universities, hospitals and research centres. These are then assessed by the RoFAR Scientific Advisory Board members with the objective of awarding projects that will open up new avenues of research. In addition to its regular research grant awards, RoFAR administers special grants for innovative proposals, which provide proof of principle and/or translational research, that is, studies which have potential for translation into clinical practice.