$25 million from Oberndorf Foundation to advance UCSF psychiatry, neuroscience research

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UC San Francisco has received an unrestricted $25 million commitment from the Bill and Susan Oberndorf Foundation to advance basic research in psychiatry and the behavioral sciences. Over the next decade, this science promises to revolutionize our understanding of the most serious psychiatric illnesses, including autism, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, substance abuse, depression and anxiety.

UCSF has long been committed to supporting the integration of basic and clinical research to discover new and more effective therapies for psychiatric illnesses, said UCSF Chancellor Sam Hawgood, MBBS. The Oberndorfs support will allow us to dramatically expand our efforts to recruit and retain the very best basic scientists who are devoted to unlocking the secrets of psychiatric illness and transforming our ability to treat and cure these conditions.

The Oberndorfs have been strong supporters of UCSF for more than two decades, including Bill Oberndorf's contribution as chair of the UCSF Board of Overseers, Hawgood said. In addition to this volunteer leadership, the couple has invested in several keystone projects, including UCSF Medical Center at Mission Bay, the Sandler Neurosciences Center, and the UCSF Helen Diller Family Cancer Research Building.

The Oberndorfs' remarkable vision and capital investments have provided vital momentum for transforming the footprint and capacity of this institution, Hawgood said. Their new commitment will lead to better understanding of psychiatric disorders, which, in turn, will help to end the marginalization of psychiatry within medicine and erase the stigma that still surrounds mental illness.

The new grant builds on an earlier $5 million gift from the Oberndorfs to create a distinguished...
professorship in psychiatry, which aimed to expand UCSF’s leadership in the field and provide the resources to create a world-class program on campus. That support enabled UCSF to recruit Matthew W. State, MD, PhD [2], a renowned child psychiatrist and internationally recognized expert on the genomics of autism and Tourette syndrome, and has galvanized many other philanthropic investments in UCSF neuroscience.

"[This gift will give our scientists] the freedom they need to pursue work that promises not only to unlock biological secrets, but to change the way that society views mental illness." - Matthew W. State, MD, PhD [3]

State, now chair and Oberndorf Family Distinguished Professor in Psychiatry at UCSF, performs studies that exemplify the tight integration of basic and clinical research that will be supported by the new Oberndorf gift. His research teams have identified more than 60 genes involved in autism, a crucial first step in developing new and better therapeutics. Other UCSF neuroscientists are making pioneering discoveries in both the molecular and circuit-based underpinnings of a range of other psychiatric afflictions, each offering different inroads to cures.

"UCSF is determined to be at the forefront of this revolution, creating a community of the very best young minds focused on this mission, and allowing them to do their most creative work, embedded in an extraordinarily strong and collaborative neuroscience community," said State. "An unrestricted gift of this magnitude will be a game-changer in our ability to recruit and support outstanding scientists in what is an extremely challenging funding climate. We will be able to give them the freedom they need to pursue work that promises not only to unlock biological secrets, but to change the way that society views mental illness," said State.

"Susan and I are very pleased to make this investment in an area of basic medical research for which there is great need. It is our hope that this gift will help to alleviate the pain in the lives of those who suffer from psychiatric and behavioral disorders as well as mitigate the impact such diseases can have on those in their lives," Bill said.

Susan added, "We have met so many brilliant young researchers in the neurosciences at UCSF. We are confident Dr. State will continue to build a team that will make tremendous gains in the field."
The Oberndorfs have long been active philanthropists, focusing on education, health care, and other public policy issues. In addition to serving as chairman of the UCSF Board of Overseers, Bill is chairman of Oberndorf Enterprises, LLC, his family’s holding corporation. Susan is president of the Bill and Susan Oberndorf Foundation and serves on numerous nonprofit boards.

Further coverage


About UCSF Psychiatry

The UCSF Department of Psychiatry [5] and the Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute are among the nation’s foremost resources in the fields of child, adolescent, adult and geriatric mental health. Together they constitute one of the largest departments in the UCSF School of Medicine, with a mission focused on research (basic, translational, clinical), teaching, patient care, and public service. UCSF Psychiatry has an organizational structure that crosses all major UCSF sites - Parnassus, Mission Bay, Laurel Heights, Mt. Zion, Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center, the San Francisco VA Health System, and UCSF Fresno.

About UCSF

UCSF [6] is a leading university dedicated to transforming health worldwide through advanced biomedical research, graduate-level education in the life sciences and health professions, and excellence in patient care. Founded in 1864 as a medical college, UCSF now includes top-ranked graduate schools of dentistry, medicine, nursing, and pharmacy; a graduate division with world-renowned programs in the biological sciences, a preeminent biomedical research enterprise and top-tier hospitals, UCSF Medical Center and UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospitals.

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[2] https://psych.ucsf.edu/matthew.state