AURORA, Colo. (Dec. 2, 2009) – The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research (MJFF) recently announced $1.5 million in total awards to six research teams, including an Associate Professor from University of Colorado Denver’s School of Pharmacy, who are working to develop potentially disease-modifying therapies for Parkinson's disease (PD). The funding was awarded under the Novel Approaches to Drug Discovery for PD program made possible by funding from Elan Corporation, a neuroscience-based biotechnology company.

“Current therapeutic approaches to treat PD are associated with serious adverse effects and fail to provide long-term control of this relentlessly progressive disease,” said Manisha Patel, PhD, an associate professor at UC Denver’s School of Pharmacy, and recipient of $300,000 of the $1.5 million awarded. “There is an urgent need for novel classes of therapeutic agents for the treatment of PD. Neuroprotective catalytic antioxidant compounds that are orally active and capable of penetrating the brain hold tremendous therapeutic potential for the treatment of PD.”

Dr. Patel’s laboratory has been actively involved in the development of catalytic antioxidants for the treatment of neuronal disorders for more than a decade. According to Dr. Patel, this project can rapidly identify novel orally active metalloporphyrins for the treatment of PD. If the project is successful, potential drug candidates can be further developed by Elan for treatment of PD.

Awardees under Novel Approaches, a program that is an important component of MJFF’s strategy of providing critical resources to underfunded areas of the drug development pipeline, include both academic and industry scientists. Of the six awardees, four teams including Dr. Patel are developing technologies to prevent the degeneration of dopaminergic neurons, the main type of cell affected in PD, by focusing on the reduction of oxidative stress and the inhibition of JNK, a protein associated with cell death. The remaining two will target the protein alpha-synuclein, whose clumping is a hallmark of PD pathology.

The selection of awardees was made exclusively by the MJFF via its standard peer-review process.
This is the second time in 2009 that the MJFF has awarded UC Denver researchers with funding for PD research. Curt Freed, MD, received a grant in Aug. to further investigate his discovery that a drug called phenylbutyrate can prevent brain deterioration in animal models of PD by turning on a protective gene called DJ-1.

About University of Colorado Denver
The University of Colorado Denver is located on two campuses, the Denver Campus and the Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, Colo. UC Denver offers more than 120 degrees and programs in 13 schools and colleges and serves more than 28,000 students. For more information, visit the UC Denver Newsroom.

About The Michael J. Fox Foundation
The Michael J. Fox Foundation is dedicated to ensuring the development of better treatments, and ultimately a cure, for Parkinson's disease through an aggressively funded research agenda. MJFF has funded over $158 million in research to date.

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