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Multi-Million Dollar Commitment Spurs First-Ever Mouse Model Studies at University of Chicago's Unique Celiac Disease Center

University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center Advisory Board Campaign Aims to Uncover New Treatments for World's Most Common Genetic Autoimmune Disease

CHICAGO (May 27, 2009) – The University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center Advisory Board has partnered with The University to launch a two million dollar campaign to support the first-ever mouse model for celiac disease, **the world's most common genetic autoimmune disease**. Celiac disease affects approximately three million Americans and is triggered by the consumption of gluten--a protein found in wheat, barley and rye.

For the first time, researchers at the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center will examine the underlying causes of the disease, test new therapies and identify new targets for treatment through mouse model research. Currently a gluten-free diet is only known treatment for celiac disease, offering only partial alleviation of symptoms.

At least ninety-seven percent of people with celiac disease have not been diagnosed. The symptoms are numerous, ranging from intestinal symptoms to neurological and psychological disorders. If undiagnosed and untreated, **it can lead to osteoporosis, infertility, neurological conditions, and cancer**. In addition, patients with celiac disease have a significantly higher chance of developing other autoimmune diseases, in particular Type-1 diabetes.

Bana Jabri, M.D., Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Chicago Medical Center, one of the world's leading celiac disease researchers, will develop the new mouse model with the goal of identifying new remedies and preventive treatments aimed at children of families with celiac disease history. The studies will also shed new light on events triggering the development of Type-1 diabetes.

The University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center is the first of its kind in the country. It has been dedicated to raising awareness and meeting the needs of those affected by the disease nationwide through education, research and advocacy since 2001.

"There is a critical need to provide the proper resources to those who suffer from celiac disease," said Stefano Guandalini, M.D., professor of pediatrics at the University of Chicago Medical Center, founder and medical director of the Celiac Disease Center. "This commitment from University of Chicago Celiac Advisory Board reaffirms the Celiac Disease Center's mission to bring cutting edge research, education and encouragement to those affected by the disease".

Dr. Jabri believes it is essential to create a mouse model of celiac disease to better understand the chain of events leading to celiac disease, its link to autoimmune diseases, and provide sustainable funds to continue programming for many years to come.

About the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center

The University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center has fundamentally improved the care, diagnosis and awareness of celiac disease. In addition, it provides the infrastructure and support that is needed to advance cutting-edge celiac research, including investigations into structure of gluten peptides and the mechanisms by which gluten modifies self molecules. The University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center is a 501-c3 non-profit organization, completely funded by donor contributions.

For more information please visit: www.celiacdisease.net

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