

### **ANIMAL RIGHTS EXTREMISM: REWARD OFFERED IN ATTEMPTED BOMBING OF UCLA DOC**

Federal and local officials posted a \$110,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of individuals involved in an attempted firebombing of a UCLA eye doctor's car in June, the Los Angeles Times reported. The Animal Liberation Brigade claimed responsibility for the attempt on a website. Authorities are calling it an act of "domestic terrorism." The doctor, Arthur Rosenbaum, is chief of pediatric ophthalmology at UCLA's Jules Stein Eye Institute. His research has included testing procedures on monkeys. The FBI asked anyone with information about the incident to call the FBI at (310) 477-6565.

### **OBESITY: RESEARCHERS FIND FAT IS SOCIALLY CONTAGIOUS**

A study coauthored by researchers at Harvard Medical School and the University of California at San Diego suggests that obesity is "socially contagious," spreading from person to person in a social network. The study, the first to examine this phenomenon, was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It found that if one person becomes obese, those closely connected to them have a greater chance of becoming obese themselves. Surprisingly, the greatest effect is seen not among people sharing the same genes or the same household but among friends. The researchers said their study showed that not only is obesity contagious, but so is thinness and that has implications for policy makers as they consider the best measures for making society healthier.

### **POLLUTION: RESEARCHERS LINK DIRTY AIR TO CLOGGED ARTERIES**

A study from researchers at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA has found a link between diesel exhaust and atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries, which significantly increases one's risk for heart attack and stroke. The findings, published in the online journal *Genome Biology*, are the first to explain how fine particles in air pollution conspire with artery-clogging fats to switch on the genes that cause blood vessel inflammation and lead to cardiovascular disease. The researchers said the combination of diesel exhaust and cholesterol creates a dangerous synergy that wreaks cardiovascular havoc far beyond what's caused by the diesel or cholesterol alone.

### **BREAST CANCER: STUDY CONFIRMS LINK TO HORMONE THERAPY**

A sharp drop in breast cancer rates from 2003 to 2004 is linked to an even larger drop in women's use of hormone therapy that began around 2000, according to a Kaiser Permanente study. The study, published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, confirms the connection between breast cancer, hormone therapy and mammography screening over the past 25 years. The researchers said the new analysis provides even stronger evidence that recent declines in menopausal hormone therapy use are linked with lower incidence of breast cancer.

### **INFLAMMATORY DISEASE: XENCOR DRUG MAY OFFER NEW CLASS OF TARGETED THERAPEUTICS**

A first-in-class protein therapeutic drug candidate has been shown to selectively inhibit its therapeutic target, according to research conducted at Xencor and published in the *Journal of Immunology*. The data provides early evidence that this new class of therapeutics may offer an alternative to non-selective therapeutics that are currently used to treat inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, the Monrovia, California-based company said. Target selectivity has the potential to significantly enhance efficacy of therapeutics while limiting their toxicity and side effects, therefore selectivity has long been the goal in the development of new therapeutics to treat inflammatory disease. The company's clinical candidate XPro 1595 DN-TNF was shown to selectively inhibit the soluble form of Tumor Necrosis Factor or TNF alpha in both human and animal cell lines and blocked inflammation in animal models. The TNF alpha drugs currently are non-specific and have rare but severe side effects.

**NICOTINE: RUSH FROM SMOKING HINGES ON SUGAR IN NEURONS**

A University of Southern California study appearing with a commentary in *Nature Neuroscience* online proposes a role for sugar as the hinge that opens a gate in the cell membrane and brings news of nicotine's arrival. The findings could open the door to not only new targets for the treatment for substance addictions, but neurological disorders such as epilepsy, schizophrenia and depression. The study provides the first detailed look at part of the mouse nicotinic acetylcholine receptor, one in a large and important group of molecules, known as ion channel proteins that allow signals to pass between neurons. The results reveal an important role for the sugar molecules in such proteins.

**BREAST CANCER: SUPPORT GROUPS DON'T EXTEND SURVIVAL**

A study from a team of Stanford University School of Medicine researchers shows that participating in support groups doesn't extend the lives of women with metastatic breast cancer. The results differ from oft-cited previous findings by the lead researcher on the study that showed group psychotherapy extended survival time. The newest research did, however, confirm that support groups improved quality of life for the participants, and showed a survival benefit for a subgroup of patients with an aggressive form of breast cancer. The paper, published on the web site of the journal *Cancer*, tracked 125 metastatic breast cancer patients for periods of up to 10 years. The researchers found an improvement in the therapy participants' level of distress, anxiety and pain. They did not, however, find a difference in overall survival between those women who attended therapy and those who didn't.

**HEART FAILURE: INITIATIVE LEADS TO MAJOR GAINS AT NATION'S HOSPITALS**

A national initiative designed to improve heart-failure patient care in hospitals proved effective at increasing hospital adherence to key quality-of-care performance measures and reducing the length of hospital stays for patients, according to researchers at UCLA. In a study published in the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*, the researchers said the effort also resulted in favorable trends for in-hospital and post-discharge mortality rates. The initiative, called the Organized Program to Initiate Lifesaving Treatment in Hospitalized Patients with Heart Failure, is the largest of its kind undertaken for heart failure in the country, with 259 hospitals participating. It is also the only one designed to capture patient outcomes data 60 to 90 days after discharge. The researchers said if similar improvements had occurred at hospitals nationwide, this would translate to 40,000 less deaths and 1.4 million costly hospital days eliminated per year.

**OBESITY: OREXIGEN DRUG MEETS GOAL IN MID-STAGE TRIAL**

Orexigen Therapeutics said its obesity drug Empatic met its primary endpoint in a mid-stage clinical trial as patients who got the drug across treatment arms experienced statistically significant weight loss compared to a placebo. The San Diego-based biopharmaceutical company said top-line results from the 24-week trial showed at the highest dose patients experiences an 8.6 percent weight loss from baseline compared to 1.1 percent weight loss for patients taking a placebo. The company expects to report additional safety and efficacy data following the completion of an ongoing 24-week trial extension.

**CANCER: WHITE BLOOD CELL BOOSTER MAY HELP PATIENTS AVOID DEADLY COMPLICATIONS**

Cancer patients who receive a drug that stimulates the growth of infection-fighting white blood cells may be significantly less likely to die from chemotherapy-related complications, according to a new study. Often chemotherapy must be delayed or altered if a patient's white blood cell counts drop too low. When that happens, a patient becomes vulnerable to dangerous infections that can be fatal. Researchers at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry and the Duke University Comprehensive Cancer Center report that patients taking a drug known as granulocyte colony-stimulating factor early in their chemotherapy were about half as likely to develop dangerously low white blood cell counts with fever, and half as likely to die from infection. The research, published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, was funded by Amgen, the maker of commonly utilized white blood cell boosters Neupogen and Neulasta.