

Support the Osteoporosis Research Center Endowment

The work of the osteoporosis research center as a local, national and international resource must continue.

An editorial appearing in the Omaha World Herald, November 13, 2006, reported a decline in funding for basic medical research by the National Institutes of Health (NIH): “Given trends in medical inflation, the current freeze in NIH funding means that universities face an increasing budgetary squeeze in trying to maintain basic medical research (the kind of non-directed research that private industry eschews).” As of July, 2009, this situation has not changed in spite of president Obama’s recovery program which is only a short term boost in NIH funding scheduled to last only two years. During the past 40 years’ work of the Osteoporosis Research Center (ORC), much of our research has been funded by the NIH. Another source of funding has been the pharmaceutical industry that has contracted with the ORC to conduct clinical trials and laboratory work in the development of new drugs. Adding to the concern regarding research funding, an article in the December 6, 2007 issue of The Wall Street Journal: *Big Pharma Faces Grim Prognosis* indicates that production of new drugs is winding down. The ORC has successfully recruited new investigators and now a shortage of funding from both our major sources is occurring just at the time they need support.

An endowment was started in 2006 for the Creighton ORC to combat the squeeze mentioned in the World Herald editorial and the concern voiced in the Wall Street Journal. The goal for the endowment is to provide about \$400,000 per year, enough to support young investigators to the point that winning NIH funds is possible.

The vision of the ORC is to discover ways to prevent fractures at all ages, in particular, among aging men and women. There are 1,500,000 fractures annually in the U.S., costing over \$18 billion in health care. More than three fourths of the fractures are due to osteoporosis, and most of them occur in women past the age of menopause. Men also suffer osteoporotic fractures at about 1/3 the rate of women. The endowment will help build on our past successes.

Forty Years of Osteoporosis Research Center’s Achievements in Osteoporosis:

- Set the U.S. government standard for recommended dietary calcium intake
- Determined the bioavailability of numerous calcium supplements
- Discovered the bone cell changes causing bone loss at menopause
- Discovered a gene mutation that prevents osteoporosis
- Contributed to the development of five drugs for treatment of osteoporosis
- Discovered that vitamin D supplements may prevent 60 % of all cancer

Ongoing and future projects:

- Determine the action of vitamin D in preventing cancer
- Determine whether (and how) vitamin D prevents infections
- Determine whether vitamin D improves bone, muscle strength and well-being in patients on artificial kidney dialysis
- Determine standards for bone development in healthy children
- Determine the cause of bone loss at menopause
- Characterize things other than bone loss that weaken the skeleton
- Determine the genetic control of bone development
- Determine the genetic contribution to osteoporotic fractures

A pathway for many years of research in the field of osteoporosis lies ahead, a path extending well into the future beyond the current leadership of the ORC. Fulfillment of this promise to cure osteoporosis and prevent the devastating effects of fracture in the elderly requires that donations be made to the Center's endowment to support the work of new leadership. **Solid endowment support for the Osteoporosis Research Center is crucial to its promising future.**



Robert R. Becker

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