RESTORES FUNDS FOR DUKE AIDS CLINICAL TRIAL UNIT

IP5DURHAM, N.C. -- The National Institutes of Health today (Friday, Feb. 28) restored funding to continue the AIDS Clinical Trial Unit (ACTU) at Duke University Medical Center. The Duke unit, which has received about $800,000 from NIH annually since 1987, is one of a nationwide network of academic medical centers that tests new AIDS drugs and therapies.

Duke and six other universities lost their funding in January, when NIH decided to reduce the number of its testing centers to 37. But because of "the issues raised and concerns about the importance of these units expressed by congressional representatives, persons with HIV infection, and other constituents," the NIH's National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) agreed to refund the units through the end of 1992, said NIAID director Anthony S. Fauci, M.D.

North Carolina Representative Tim Valentine and Senator Terry Sanford were part of a group of congressional delegates that lobbied NIH to restore the funding, which was scheduled to end today.

"We are delighted that funding for the AIDS Clinical Trials has been restored to Duke University Medical Center," said Ralph Snyderman, M.D., Duke chancellor for health affairs. "Duke is dedicated to doing all that it can to combat AIDS."

Said Duke's ACTU Director John A. Bartlett, M.D., "I am extremely pleased that our unit is back up and running. And I welcome the opportunity to show Duke's ability to bring discoveries in the laboratory to clinical fruition."

Among the trials that the Duke ACTU planned this year is an assessment of the value of combining two FDA-approved AIDS drugs, AZT and DDI or DDC, in treating asymptomatic HIV patients. The unit also plans to test an NIH HIV vaccine in combination with Interleukin-2, which stimulates the immune system to respond to vaccine therapy.

The ACTU is one of many programs that makes Duke a leader in AIDS research, said Snyderman. The medical center's AIDS research effort ranges from developing treatments for AIDS patients to developing an HIV vaccine.

Snyderman also cited the national Central Immunology Laboratory, established in 1991 at Duke by a $4.4-million NIH grant. The laboratory evaluates the ability of experimental AIDS vaccines to protect humans against HIV infection. Studying results of AIDS vaccine clinical trials underway at five national testing sites, the lab determines if the vaccines work and why.

Duke is also a Center for AIDS Research (CFAR), one of nine such federally funded centers. Duke receives $1 million yearly through CFAR to conduct basic research on the virus and to develop AIDS vaccine models, among other projects.

The medical center is also developing therapeutic agents to treat AIDS patients; Duke collaborated with Burroughs-Wellcome and the
National Cancer Institute to develop and test the first AIDS drug, AZT. The first trials of AZT for children were also conducted at Duke. Other medical centers that regained their ACTU funding were at Tulane University, Pennsylvania State University, University of Cincinnati, State University of New York at Stony Brook, University of Massachusetts at Worcester, and St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City.