LA JOLLA, Feb. 2 -- The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and
Alcoholism has awarded a $6.1 million grant to a Research Institute of
Scripps Clinic investigator studying alcohol's affects on the brain and
central nervous system.

Dr. Floyd Bloom, head of the Scripps Clinic preclinical neuroscience
and endocrinology division and director of the Scripps Clinic-Salk
Institute-UCSD Alcohol Research Center, leads a group of investigators
from the three institutions in a broad examination of the molecular,
cellular and behavioral changes caused by chronic alcohol use.

"Alcohol has a tremendous negative impact on society, but through
these investigations, we hope to reduce that burden," said Bloom. "By
determining exactly how alcohol acts on the brain, we may one day find
new strategies and medications to treat drug abuse and addiction."

Specifically, the five-year grant will fund studies into how exposing
the developing brain of a human fetus to alcohol, or ethanol, causes
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, a devastating condition that results in severe
height, weight and mental retardation in the newborn. The research team
will also study how alcohol intoxicates the brain for short periods and
why some people, especially sons of alcoholics, are biologically
predisposed to alcoholism.

(More)
The grant, renewed for the third time, has funded the Alcohol Research Center since 1977. Past key findings of the group include the realization that the combination of a pregnant woman's use of alcohol with a poor diet causes much more damage to her unborn child than alcohol abuse alone. Also, research revealed that alcohol causes some neurotransmitters, the chemicals brain cells use to communicate with one another, to function faster, causing, for example, a message overload in the cerebellum and, thus, poor coordination.

Other investigators include Drs. Donna Gruol, Steven Henriksen, George Koob, Robert Milner and George Siggins of the Research Institute of Scripps Clinic, Dr. Catherine Rivier of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, and Dr. Marc Schuckitt of the University of California, San Diego.

Bloom has been with Scripps Clinic since 1983. From 1975-83, he was director of the Arthur Vining Davis Center for Behavioral Neurobiology at the Salk Institute. Earlier affiliations were with the National Institute of Mental Health and Yale University Medical School.

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