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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust Provides \$5.5 million in Seed Money for Adult Stem Cell Research

OKLAHOMA CITY (February 24, 2010) – The Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) during its quarterly meeting approved a proposal creating a virtual research center to be known as the *Oklahoma Center for Adult Stem Cell Research*. This \$5.5 million investment in adult stem cell research over the next five years will catalyze the work of Oklahoma scientists, leverage resources obtainable from the federal government and other funding entities, and help attract additional talent to the state.

The purpose of the virtual research center is to build Oklahoma excellence in one of the fastest growing areas of medical research and to serve as a trusted resource for public information. Initial members of the center will include Oklahoma State University, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

“Improving the health of Oklahomans requires a multi-faceted approach that includes prevention and research,” said Casey Killblane, TSET board of directors’ chair. “Expanding TSET’s current research funding to include adult stem cell research will help position our state as a leader in this area and offers the potential to provide dramatically improved treatment options for a variety of conditions including heart attack, stroke, lung disease, and cancer which plague our state.”

Adult stem cells are undifferentiated cells found throughout the body that multiply by cell division to replenish dying cells and regenerate damaged tissues. Scientific interest in adult stem cells has centered on their ability to divide or *self-renew* indefinitely, potentially regenerating entire organs from a few cells. Oklahoma researchers are optimistic about the medical advancements that may come from adult stem cells.

“Adult stem cells are undifferentiated cells that give us the potential to reprogram the body to fight cancer, replace cells destroyed by diabetes and regenerate tissue throughout the body,” said Joseph Ferretti, Ph.D., Provost and Senior Vice President at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. “Dedicated researchers at the OUHSC already are in the forefront of identifying, isolating and targeting adult stem cells to develop the next generation of cancer therapy and regenerate bladder tissue. Funding generated by the Center will enhance our efforts to find cures and help provide the quality health care and therapies Oklahomans deserve.”

A similar approach to this type of research funding has been taken before by the TSET board with the successful establishment of the Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center (OTRC) at the OU Cancer Institute. Using a competitive, peer-review process, the OTRC supported three research projects during its first year, four during its second year, and is currently reviewing its third round of seed grants. The OTRC has applied for six federal grants seeking additional funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). One five-year grant was recently funded by the National Cancer Institute at \$1.5 million.

"OSU is delighted to participate in the new Center" said Stephen McKeever, Oklahoma State University Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer. "Research on adult stem cells offers many exciting possibilities to combat disease through tissue regeneration and the vision of the TSET Board in establishing the Center is to be applauded."

The structure for *Oklahoma Center for Adult Stem Cell Research* will include a governing body comprised of representatives from at least three Oklahoma research institutions. Initial members will be:

- Stephen McKeever, Ph.D., Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer, Oklahoma State University
- Stephen M. Prescott, M.D., President, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation
- Joseph J. Ferretti, Ph.D., Senior Vice President and Provost, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

The governing body will be charged with establishing broad goals for the Center, appointing the scientific director, approving members of the steering committee, approving the annual budget, and monitoring its progress. The scientific director will be responsible for day-to-day operation of the Center. The steering committee's role will be to conduct the peer review needed to assure scientific excellence, establish funding priorities and develop new ways to propel research in adult stem cell research.

The Center's administrative office will be housed at Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (OMRF) by agreement of the governing board. Paul W. Kincade Ph.D., Program Chair, Immunobiology and Cancer Research at OMRF, will serve as the Center's first scientific director.

“This is a bold step for Oklahoma, a real chance for us to blaze a new path,” said Stephen M. Prescott, M.D., President, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. “Researchers have already had great success reprogramming adult stem cells. With this new Center, our state’s scientists will have the resources to explore therapeutic and diagnostic applications for cells that already exist in all of our bodies.”

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*The **Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust** was established through a constitutional amendment approved by Oklahoma voters in November 2000. While most state governments have failed to keep their promise to use tobacco settlement funds for tobacco prevention and other programs to improve health, Oklahomans have created an endowment to assure that funds will be available for these purposes for generations to come. More information can be found on the Web by visiting: www.tset.ok.gov.*

*The **Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation** is an independent, nonprofit biomedical research institute dedicated to understanding and developing more effective treatments for human diseases. Chartered in 1946, its scientists focus on such critical research areas as Alzheimer’s disease, cancer, lupus and cardiovascular disease. For additional Information, visit www.omrf.org.*

*As Oklahoma’s only comprehensive academic cancer center, the **OU Cancer Institute** is raising the standard of cancer treatment in the state through research and education. The center is working toward an application to the National Cancer Institute to be designated as a “Comprehensive Cancer Center,” the gold standard of cancer research and care. Later this year, the OU Cancer Institute will move into a new 210,000-square-foot building. The facility will bring all outpatient cancer programs under one roof at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. For additional Information, visit www.OUCancer.org.*

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