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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust Moves Innovation Forward Board Approves Funding of Adult Stem Cell Research

OKLAHOMA CITY (May 18, 2009) – The Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) during its quarterly meeting today approved funding to support adult stem cell research beginning in fiscal year 2010. The vote followed presentations on *Adult Stem Cell Research in Oklahoma and its Relevance to Cancer and Cardiovascular Disease* by Courtney Houchen, MD, Chief, G.I. and Digestive Diseases Section, Department of Medicine, OUHSC; and Stephen M. Prescott, M.D., President, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

“A part of the board’s strategic plan is to recognize emerging opportunities that will improve the health of Oklahomans,” said Casey Killblane, TSET board of directors’ chair. “Adult stem cell research has the potential to provide dramatically improved treatment options for a variety of conditions including heart attack, stroke, lung disease, and cancer. There has been a great deal of support in Oklahoma among researchers, the legislature, and non-profit health organizations for funding adult stem cell research. TSET funding can serve as a base to help position our state as a leader in adult stem cell research.”

The board has committed \$500,000 for a year-long planning phase, followed by \$1 million per year for the following five-year implementation phase, for a total of \$5.5 million. TSET will take the first step in this new initiative by convening stakeholders to identify current activities and resources related to adult stem cell research in Oklahoma. A comprehensive plan will be developed to include an operational plan, opportunities for leveraged funding from other sources, expected outcomes, and performance measures to monitor effectiveness and assure the best use of these public funds.

“The board understands that a long-term investment is necessary to launch any new initiative and leverage additional funding from public and private sources,” said Killblane. “A similar approach was used two years ago when funding was approved by the board for the Oklahoma Tobacco Research Center (OTRC), a program of the OU Cancer Institute. The OTRC funded three research projects during its first year, is preparing to release its second round of seed grants, and has applied for two federal grants seeking additional funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).”

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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 hold the potential to be reprogrammed for therapeutic applications, and treating patients with their own cells would avoid the problem of immune rejection,” said Stephen M. Prescott, M.D., President, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. “OMRF’s scientists have been among the thought leaders in this emerging field, and they have developed methods that hold the promise for remarkable new treatments using these cells. This new funding initiative will accelerate this research while speeding the delivery of new treatments to Oklahomans suffering from life-threatening diseases.”

“Adult stem cell research holds tremendous potential for understanding and fighting cancer,” said Courtney Houchen, M.D., a member of the OU Cancer Institute and Chief, Digestive Diseases Section, Department of Medicine, OUHSC. “Researchers at the OU Health Sciences Center and across Oklahoma are in the forefront of identifying, isolating and targeting adult stem cells in order to develop the next generation of cancer drugs. This funding will enhance and accelerate these efforts.”

In other actions, the board approved a preliminary budget of \$19.9 million for fiscal year 2010 which includes \$1.1 million from the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Administrative expenses remain at less than 5 percent of the total budget. Program grants and contracts were also renewed including the new tobacco cessation systems grants awarded in fiscal year 2009 to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Oklahoma Insurance Department, and the Oklahoma Hospital Association.

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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](http://www.tset.ok.gov).