The UC San Diego Eating Disorders Center for treatment and research has earned an international reputation as a leader in research and treatment development for eating disorders. We are committed to finding the root causes of eating disorders to effectively treat and ultimately cure these debilitating disorders.

Our program focuses on researching genetics and brain imaging to learn more about the causes of eating disorders and developing therapies to effectively treat patients. The center offers one of the nation’s only outpatient treatment programs specifically designed to involve family members in the treatment of a child with an eating disorder. At a time when eating disorders are still widely misunderstood by the public and ineffective for-profit treatment options abound, our work is critical to bringing more informed and effective care to the broadest audience possible.

With your help, we can more rapidly transform research into innovative treatments that will change and improve the quality of life for countless individuals. Private gifts are key to accelerating the translation of discoveries into solutions for those suffering from eating disorders.

Thank you for helping us transform the way the world understands, treats, and cares for eating disorders.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
Marciel MacEwan, Director of Development
UC San Diego Health Sciences Advancement
(858) 246-2137 | mmacewan@ucsd.edu
Dear Friends,

Thanks to your partnership and support, the Eating Disorders Center for Treatment and Research at UC San Diego Health continues to set the bar for exceptional care for eating disorders that impact 30 million people in the United States alone. I am proud to share what we have accomplished in the past year to make evidence-based, effective care more widely available to those who need it.

The Center had an outstanding year investigating some of the toughest questions in the field. Why do patients with eating disorders have a thirty-percent chance of relapse? How can we optimize treatment for each individual? Answering these important questions helps to shed light on the underlying causes of eating disorders and informs more effective approaches to treatment.

This year, our growing team of 100 caring and committed clinicians, dietitians, therapists, psychologists, nurses, nurse practitioners, and support staff provided leading-edge treatment to more than 350 patients in our five clinics. We continue to work with insurance companies to make eating disorders treatment more accessible, and today our patients pay less than three percent of treatment costs.

Philanthropy continues to be the driving force behind our work, enabling us to fast-track research projects and deliver the highest level of care. I am delighted to share this update about our growth and discoveries with you. On behalf of all of us at the Eating Disorders Center, thank you for making our progress possible.

Sincerely,

Walter Kaye, M.D.
Founder and Executive Director,
Eating Disorders Center for Treatment and Research
Professor, UC San Diego Department of Psychiatry
FROM THE DIRECTOR

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Exploring the Promise of Cannabis for Anorexia Treatment

In 2019 the Eating Disorders Center is initiating a clinical trial to examine the safety and tolerability of cannabidiol (CBD), a chemical found in the cannabis plant, and its potential therapeutic benefits for adults with anorexia nervosa. “Anorexia nervosa is difficult to treat and, in some cases, may be a fatal condition,” says Emily Gray, MD, clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at UC San Diego. “There is preliminary research that suggests cannabinoids may be beneficial in treating this and other eating disorders. The administration of CBD is of interest because of the possibility that this drug might reduce anxiety, and perhaps normalize reward and motivation. The UC San Diego Eating Disorders Center has been at the forefront of understanding the neurobiology of these diseases and looks forward to further investigating.”

Because there are no proven treatments that normalize core symptoms in adult anorexia nervosa, many individuals seek out alternative approaches to care. CBD is a major chemical compound found in cannabis. It does not produce the “high” caused by THC, but interacts with the body’s endocannabinoid system; a network that regulates diverse physiological and cognitive processes including appetite, food intake, energy balance, and anxiety.

Revealing the Genetics of Eating Disorders

What can our genes tell us about who is most likely to relapse — and what biological or pharmacological interventions will be most effective?

In addition to influencing how eating disorders develop, genetic factors could play a part in determining why some people experience chronic illness while others recover. In a study led by Dr. Kaye involving almost 2,000 women with anorexia and bulimia, researchers identified genetic variations in receptors involved in neural signaling that are associated with the likelihood of recovery. Studies such as these are revealing that, like many psychiatric conditions, eating disorders are influenced by a complex network of biological pathways rather than a few specific genes. It also uncovers new knowledge about the traits and vulnerabilities of people who develop eating disorders, which often include anxiety, perfectionism, and harm avoidance.
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The benefits of sports are well recognized, but athletic competition, however, can also cause severe psychological and physical stress that is amplified in individuals who struggle with anxiety, depression, and the need for perfection. — National Eating Disorders Association

Temperament-Based Treatment (TBT): We continue to develop TBT, where our neuroimaging findings are translated to new treatments.

Housing facilities for eight patients and three families are now available to individuals seeking treatment with us.

We collaborate with top stem-cell labs to investigate the neurochemistry of eating disorders and evaluate pharmacological interventions.

A PLACE FOR ATHLETES
ADDRESSING THE COMPLEX CHALLENGES OF SPORTS-RELATED EATING DISORDERS

Elite athletes are known for their exceptional drive, motivation, and discipline. From cyclists to swimmers, to wrestlers to dancers, top athletes dedicate their lives to fine-tuning their physical instruments — their bodies — into the perfect machines. Yet the traits that propel an athlete to succeed are also commonly found in individuals with eating disorders. The pressure to achieve better results, coupled with an emphasis on performance, weight and body shape can create a toxic situation that may encourage disordered eating. If left unchecked, these traits can lead to a full-blown eating disorder. A recent study of Division 1 NCAA athletes found that over one-third of female athletes reported attitudes and symptoms placing them at risk for anorexia nervosa.

In response to this growing epidemic, the Eating Disorders Center launched a clinical track to meet the unique needs of athletes with eating disorders. Rooted in research about how neurobiological mechanisms are expressed through behavior and personality, our specialized treatment is embedded in our program. Athletes work with a customized team of experts to help them overcome an eating disorder and return to competition. Therapists with specialized training work with athletes to tailor care to the individual and treat the whole patient, while incorporating support for their sport as a tenant of their treatment. Dietitians with athletic training backgrounds and experience treating elite athletes take treatment beyond the clinic and work with athletes in their sport environment to encourage recovery while training.

Incorporating training, exercise, and sport into eating disorder treatment is unique as many facilities require patients to abstain from movement while recovering. However, for an athlete ceasing movement can feel like a loss of identity. Instead, we aim to integrate recovery into their lives as athletes. We work alongside coaches to support the recovery and training process.

Beyond athletes, the future of treatment for eating disorders incorporates movement. The center is committed to implementing healthy movement and activity into all treatment tracks. This approach not only creates better outcomes, but also gives individuals the tools they need to lead healthy lifestyles after treatment. They gain confidence by learning to refuel their bodies appropriately when incorporating exercise into their recovery. This is another example of our commitment to individualizing care and creating the best possible outcome for each patient.

“A PLACE FOR ATHLETES” Treatment at UC San Diego was really unique for me because both my therapist and dietitian were very well versed in the world of athletes. While working through my disorder and getting healthy, I was able to refine and work on my goals as a swimmer. My therapist, dietician, and I all communicated very closely about doing my sport and what that would look like mentally and physically. Everything I did was closely monitored to make sure I was supporting my recovery but also on the road to meeting my performance goals. I cannot say enough about how grateful I am to have been able to seek treatment for my eating disorder at a place that provided individualized emphasis on my sport.”

SPOTLIGHT: EVA MERRELL
TWO-TIME USA SWIMMING SCHOLASTIC ALL-AMERICAN

“I think I had to really look toward my views on athletics. My eating disorder was restrictive, and part of that stemmed from me wanting to be the best athlete I could be. I thought if certain athletes look like this, if certain athletes eat and perform like this, I have to do the same. So it was really redefining what my body needed and how well I perform as an athlete, just for myself, and not comparing it to anyone else.”

ADVANCING RESEARCH AND TREATMENT FOR ALL
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**ADVANCING RESEARCH AND TREATMENT FOR ALL**
FACILITY AND CLINIC UPDATES

CLINIC RENOVATION

Since our founding in 2005, the Eating Disorders Center has grown by leaps and bounds. We’ve come a long way from our humble beginnings in a small, leased office with only three rooms to our current clinic and research facilities that span two floors. Based on the needs of our patients and expertise of our center, our growth isn’t slowing anytime soon.

We recently renovated our third-floor suite, added a new research suite, and built a pediatric clinic on our second floor to accommodate our youngest patients, which can be as young as six years old. We remain the only center capable of treating young children in a partial hospitalization setting. Our expanded facilities have created space to further tailor treatment to every individual across all programs. We’re proud to be leading the way in treating the whole-person.

Another highlight of our renovation is the newly expanded full-size commercial kitchen, staffed with a team of eight full-time chefs to help us nourish and heal our patients throughout their treatment. We took nourishment and patient education a step further by building an additional, separate kitchen, dedicated to hosting cooking classes. In this unique space, our patients learn pragmatic skills for recovery and engage in exposure therapy through cooking. Our new kitchens help us give patients and their families skills that will support them in recovery beyond the clinic.

We’re really proud of these improvements because they allow us to offer multi-faceted, compassionate care that empowers our patients to live impassioned lives.

INNOVATIONS IN EATING DISORDERS RESEARCH AND CARE

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER

DR. GUIDO FRANK

In 2019, the Eating Disorders Center welcomed Dr. Guido Frank a leading expert in the neurobiology of eating disorders and most recently served as the head of the Developmental Brain Imaging Program at the University of Colorado Denver and Children’s Hospital Colorado.

With a doctorate from Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, Germany, Dr. Frank completed an internship and worked as a post-graduate resident at the Psychosomatic Hospital Rosenne in Prien, Germany before relocating to the U.S. and working for three years in the Eating Disorders Research Department at the University of Pittsburgh. He then went on to complete both adult and child and adolescent psychiatric training, and a fellowship in biological psychiatry and neuroscience at the University of California San Diego.

A frequent collaborator with the center, Dr. Frank has helped with landmark studies, including the finding that altered neural circuitry may lead to anorexia and bulimia. Dr. Frank’s research interests are primarily focused on investigating brain biology that underlies eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder. He is especially interested in understanding what biological circuits in the brain drive, for instance, food restriction, binge eating, or anxiety associated with body image. Ultimately, he hopes to identify medications that will make treatment easier, faster, and more successful.

Dr. Frank looks forward to forming new collaborations and partnerships in UC San Diego’s rich research ecosystem.

Dr. Frank and his family relocated to San Diego from Colorado earlier this summer. He is excited to explore all of the beaches in San Diego and spend time making his signature dish, Bavarian pretzels, with his family. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Frank!

MEET DR. TAMMY MAGINOT

DIRECTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AT THE MEDICAL BEHAVIORAL UNIT

With her doctorate in clinical psychology and specialization in pediatric health psychology and the medical stabilization of eating disorders, Tammy is passionate about providing quality, evidence-based care for patients and their families while they are going through the crisis of hospitalization.

As one of the only inpatient medical stabilization units in California and in the country, the MBU offers comprehensive medical and psychiatric care to patients most in need. Tammy joined the Eating Disorders Center in 2013 and is proud to lead a team of dedicated, creative, and hard-working clinicians from various backgrounds who share her excitement for working with intelligent, hardworking, and complex eating disorder patients. She finds an immense amount of joy in helping patients achieve their true potential through recovery.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE MEDICAL BEHAVIOR UNIT AT RADY CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

One of the most unique and important facets of the Eating Disorders Center is our Medical Behavior Unit (MBU), which is housed at Rady Children’s Hospital. This special intensive care unit is staffed by a combination of experts which include dietitians, mental health providers, adolescent medicine specialists and child psychiatrists, allowing us to offer multidisciplinary treatment to critically ill patients up to age 30.

Rooted in our understanding of the neurobiological basis of eating disorders, the MBU provides both medical stabilization and behavioral interventions to treat individuals hospitalized for medical instability. This specialized care is unique as many hospitals can only treat medical symptoms of an eating disorder. Our program allows for therapy to start in an inpatient setting. We offer dialectic behavioral therapy (DBT) skills groups as well as individual and family therapy. For our adolescent patients we begin family-based treatment while on the unit to empower parents from the onset of treatment. We also offer weekly yoga and gentle movement for our patients while hospitalized. Since opening our doors in 2012, the MBU continues to grow substantially. Our patients receive therapeutic care from six eating disorders clinicians and highly trained registered dietitians seven days a week. To continue to meet the needs of our patients, we recently welcomed two specialty-trained adolescent physicians with expertise in eating disorders and we are in the process of hiring two new psychiatrists. We have grown from our initial six-bed unit in 2011 to 12 beds in 2019, and we still need more space to serve our adult population.

Our inpatient unit is instrumental in restoring individuals’ health in a safer and quicker manner. No other facility in California can provide this intensive care for adult eating disorders patients. Moreover, we are one of three facilities in the entire country that is capable of providing this level of medical and behavioral intervention. Each year, over a dozen hospitals contact us for support with their inpatient eating disorders cases. We continue to receive transfers from other hospitals — including UC San Francisco, Chicago Children’s, and Columbia — to treat their most severe patients. It is our goal to continue to develop our inpatient care to better serve the needs of those who are struggling and medically compromised as a result of their severe eating disorder symptoms.
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PAC parents have also become advocates and activists in the larger eating disorder community, leading support communities, serving on the board of Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders, attending and speaking at conferences, lobbying in Washington, DC, and launching World Eating Disorders Day of Action with other parent advocates.

Our parent advisory committee

The UC San Diego Eating Disorders Center has pioneered the revolutionary concept of including parents as treatment team members. As part of that parent focus, we formed a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) in 2012 to provide input and feedback and – most importantly – experienced mentorship to the parents of children and adolescents receiving treatment through UC San Diego. PAC parents have also become advocates and activists in the larger eating disorder community, leading support communities, serving on the board of Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders (FEAST), attending and speaking at conferences, lobbying in Washington, DC, and launching World Eating Disorders Day of Action with other parent advocates.

PAC members find that Structured Parent Mentoring is an important addition to Family Based Treatment and vastly better than traditional treatment. We want families all over the world to be able to access this impactful type of peer support. Through our work with parent mentees and online eating disorders peer communities, we have seen the strengthening and healing power of the collective education and wisdom of parents who help illuminate the steps to recovery for both the patient and family.

For more information, contact the Parent Advisory Committee at edintake@ucsd.edu

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No other center is poised to change the way we understand, diagnose, and treat eating disorders like Dr. Kaye, Dr. Gray, Sarah Archer, and the complete UC San Diego team.

Through our investment, we are empowering this interdisciplinary team of experts to accelerate discoveries and translate them into solutions to improve the lives of teens and their families. Please join us in supporting the transformational work taking place at this world-class institution. There is still much work to be done.

— Proud parents of a program graduate

GIVING BACK THROUGH TIME AND TALENT

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The Campaign For UC San Diego
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At the University of California San Diego, challenging convention is our most cherished tradition. Through the Campaign for UC San Diego—our university-wide comprehensive fundraising effort concluding in 2022—and together with our philanthropic partners, we will continue our nontraditional path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries, and planet-changing impact.

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