$100 million gift creates Duchossois Family Institute

A Chicago-area family with a deep commitment to supporting science and medicine is giving $100 million to establish The Duchossois Family Institute at the University of Chicago Medicine, which seeks to accelerate research and interventions based on how the human immune system, microbiome and genetics interact to maintain health.

The gift from The Duchossois Group Inc. Chairman and CEO Craig Duchossois, his wife, Janet Duchossois, and The Duchossois Family Foundation will support development of a “new science of wellness” aimed at preserving health and complementing medicine’s traditional focus on disease treatment. Their investment will help build an entrepreneurial infrastructure that stimulates research, data integration and clinical applications, while educating the next generation of young physicians and students in this new science.

“The Duchossois Family Institute will draw on the creativity and skill of University researchers across many fields in bringing new perspectives to medical science, oriented toward making an impact that greatly benefits human lives.”
—President Robert J. Zimmer

By providing resources and research infrastructure, The Duchossois Family Institute: Harnessing the Microbiome and Immunity for Human Health will allow faculty and students to focus on preventing disease by optimizing the body’s own defenses and finding new ways to maintain well-being. With the embedded expertise of the University’s Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation.
they will work aggressively to bring breakthroughs to market through partnerships with industry, venture capitalists, government agencies, like-minded philanthropists and the public.

“The Duchossois Family Institute will draw on the creativity and skill of University researchers across many fields in bringing new perspectives to medical science, oriented toward making an impact that greatly benefits human lives,” said President Robert J. Zimmer. “We are grateful for the Duchossois family’s remarkable level of engagement in establishing this innovative alliance between medical experts and entrepreneurs.”

The amount is the largest single gift in support of UChicago Medicine and brings the family’s lifetime charitable contributions to the academic medical center to $137 million. The Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research (https://ludwigcenter.uchicago.edu/) has donated a total of $118 million since 2006, largely to support cancer research.

The Duchossois gift is also the fourth time there has been a single gift of $100 million or more to the University of Chicago. The Thomas L. Pearson and The Pearson Family Members Foundation made a grant of $100 million (http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/article/2008/11/06/alumnus-david-booth-gives-300-million-university-chicago-booth-school-business-na) in 2008 from investment entrepreneur David Booth, MBA’71, for whom the University of Chicago Booth School of Business is named.

‘New science of wellness’

Until now, much of the research on the microbiome—the community of bacteria, fungi, viruses and other microorganisms living in the body, primarily the digestive tract—and its relation to human health has focused on its relationship to disease. Recent discoveries, many at the University of Chicago, demonstrate that the genetic material encoded within the microbiome is a critical factor in fine-tuning the immune system and can be powerful in maintaining well-being and preventing disease. New computer technology to integrate and analyze vast amounts of biological and medical data—pioneered by the National Cancer Institute Genomic Data Commons (https://gdc.cancer.gov/), developed and operated by the University—also is allowing researchers from disparate disciplines and locations to work toward common interests and solutions.

The Duchossois family wanted to support the application of these discoveries to improve health, and turned to leaders at the University of Chicago for ideas.
“We wanted to find a way to be transformative in our giving and looked to the University of Chicago and asked, ‘What is the nature of what’s in our bodies that helps us stay well?’” said Ashley Joyce, president of The Duchossois Family Foundation. “They came back with an answer that connected all the dots, confirming the potential for a new science of wellness that fundamentally explores how the immune system and microbiome interact.”

Focusing on factors crucial to maintaining wellness could greatly expand the tools available to medical researchers and entrepreneurs. Early targets identified by institute scientists envision a potential future in which:

- Peanuts, milk and eggs could safely return to school menus.
- Children with asthma play outside, confident they can breathe without inhalers.
- Inexpensive sensors help families adjust their homes to optimize health.
- Doctors guide patients to foods and probiotics to win the fight against obesity.
- Technologies pinpoint the microbes needed to treat and prevent autoimmune diseases.
- Probiotics and prebiotics improve the effectiveness of cancer and antidepressant drugs.
- Judiciously used antibiotics reduce the impact of Alzheimer’s disease.

**Building on strengths at UChicago**

The institute will build on insights already gained from research at the University of Chicago.

“The family recognized the University’s and Medical Center’s leadership in genomics, the human immune system, data analytics and the microbiome,” said T. Conrad Gilliam, dean for basic science in the Division of the Biological Sciences, who will lead efforts to launch the institute. “The new institute will integrate these areas into this new science focused on longstanding health and the body’s natural ability to maintain wellness.”

The Duchossois Family Institute will support leading-edge technologies and services including:

- A clinical repository to maintain biological samples
- Microbial cultivation and analysis tools
- Next-generation platform to identify biomarkers that mediate between the microbiome and immune system
- Medicinal chemistry to pinpoint biomarkers and develop more effective therapies
- High-throughput genetic sequencing for microbial DNA
- A data commons for sharing large amounts of microbial, environmental and medical information

The Duchossois Family Institute’s efforts will bring together investigators across the University of Chicago as well as affiliates at Argonne National Laboratory, the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Mass., and eventually many more partners.
In addition, the University will embed commercialization specialists from its Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation within the institute to promote participation and support of the business community to further accelerate innovation. Polsky’s proven expertise will ensure that the intellectual property generated is protected, licensed and potentially spun off for business development for the benefit of participating institutions and the entire region.

“Sustainability and entrepreneurship are critical to the success of this new endeavor,” said Craig Duchossois, a longtime trustee of both the University and the Medical Center. “The fact that we are able to leverage so many resources at one university means we can aggressively advance the progress of this new science and help society.”

A history of giving

The latest gift continues a history of giving to UChicago that spans 37 years, inspired by the care that Beverly Duchossois, late wife of Richard Duchossois, received at what was then called the University of Chicago Hospital. In 1980, Richard Duchossois established the Beverly E. Duchossois Cancer Fund in memory of his wife.

In the years since, the family has given the University a total of $37 million to drive innovation and transformative care at the medical center, including a named professorship and several cancer research funds. That amount includes a $21 million gift in 1994 (http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/940310/gift.shtml) to establish the Duchossois Center for Advanced Medicine (http://www.uchospitals.edu/about/dcam.html), which is home to outpatient specialty clinics, diagnostic centers and treatment facilities at the University of Chicago Medicine.

“We are honored and privileged to be the beneficiary of such enormous generosity and are excited by what the science can accomplish,” said Kenneth S. Polonsky, dean of the Division of the Biological Sciences and the Pritzker School of Medicine and executive vice president of medical affairs. “The gift invests in a core strength of UChicago Medicine: our basic science research and our ability to quickly translate that research for the benefit of patients.”

In addition to Craig Duchossois’ service as a trustee, Janet Duchossois serves as a member of the University of Chicago Women’s Board. The Duchossois Family Foundation is made up of family members spanning three generations including patriarch Richard; son and daughter-in-law, Craig and Janet; daughters Kimberly Duchossois, a University of Chicago Cancer Research Foundation board member, and Dayle Fortino; and grandchildren, including Ashley Joyce, a University of Chicago graduate and former member of the School of Social Service Administration Visiting Committee, Jessica Swoyer Green and Ilaria Woodward.

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