

BIPAI opens HIV/AIDS International Laboratory Center of Excellence

HOUSTON -- (May 11, 2007) -- The efforts of the Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative expanded in a new direction with the opening of a state-of-the-art laboratory in partnership with and located at the Stefan S. Nicolau Institute of Virology in Bucharest, Romania.

Dedication ceremonies were held today for the HIV/AIDS International Laboratory Center of Excellence, a joint project of the Nicolau Institute, Baylor College of Medicine and BIPAI.

The laboratory center of excellence joins outpatient centers of excellence BIPAI has established in Romania and throughout Africa.

A grant from Abbott Fund financed the capital improvements for the HIV/AIDS International Laboratory Center.

"It is most appropriate that the first laboratory center of excellence in our expanding network is in Romania," said Dr. Mark Kline, president of BIPAI, professor of pediatrics at BCM, and chief of retrovirology at Texas Children's Hospital. "Our first outpatient center of excellence, which has transformed the lives of thousands of children and served as a model for our other centers, was established in Constanta, Romania, in 2001."

"I am delighted to join with the Nicolau Institute to work together on research projects, as well as expanding training programs between the two institutions," Kline said. "This collaboration makes all of us stronger."

The Nicolau Institute and BCM will collaborate on research in virology and HIV/AIDS, and will participate in an exchange program for students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty.

Participants from the Nicolau Institute will travel to BCM in Houston for research and training experiences and BCM trainees and faculty will travel to the institute in Bucharest.

"We are proud to support the laboratory center as part of our long-standing partnership with Baylor to help address pediatric HIV/AIDS in Romania and throughout Baylor's network of clinics," said Jeff Richardson, vice president, Abbott Fund. "Investing in health care infrastructure is critical to providing the best possible care for children with HIV."

Dr. Simona Ruta, associate professor of virology at the Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy and senior researcher at the Nicolau Institute, serves as the founding director of the laboratory.

"This center will help us to develop new international projects devoted to the understanding of the effects of HIV-1 clade diversity on viral fitness, pathogenesis, and treatment response and will attract young scientists to work in the fields of HIV/AIDS " Ruta said.

Ruta, Kline and Richardson were joined at the dedication by officials of the Romanian Academy; Professor Costin Cernescu, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy; Professor Mihai Stoian, director of the Nicolau Institute; and Michael Mizwa, Gordon Schutze, Nancy Calles and David Jones, all vice presidents of BIPAI.

Since opening the Romanian-American Children's Center in Constanta, BIPAI has added to the network with clinics in Botswana, Uganda, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi and Burkina Faso.