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## **Florida-based AvMed Health Plans Funds Prestigious Research Grant**

Miami, June 30, 2009 — Young research scientists throughout Florida who apply for national American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) Research Grants now can also compete for AFAR's first Florida-based research grant, thanks to AvMed Health Plans. To be named the "**AvMed Health Plans AFAR Florida Research Grant**," the new \$75,000 research grant will be awarded to a deserving young Ph.D. or M.D. investigator studying the biology of aging and age-related disease at a Florida research institution.

"As a Florida-based and Florida-focused company, we are proud to support the work of an AFAR Florida scientist through the AvMed Health Plans AFAR Florida Research Grant," said Ed Hannum, president of AvMed Health Plans. "Our mission is very much aligned with the goals of AFAR researchers – that is, to improve the health and quality of life of Floridians. We believe aging research is essential to understanding the underlying causes of many diseases prevalent among seniors and we support AFAR's efforts to reduce the suffering and ultimately, the healthcare costs associated with these diseases."

Since its founding in 1981, AFAR has been very successful at providing start-up funding to scientists in the early phases of their careers, enabling them to study the basic mechanisms of aging, age-related diseases and processes underlying common geriatric functional disorders.

"Nearly all major diseases, including many cancers, heart disease, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other neurodegenerative diseases, occur with greater frequency as we age. In Florida, which is ranked *first* in the nation in its percentage of residents age 65+, these health concerns are even more urgent," said Bernard Roos, M.D., president of the board of directors of AFAR Florida, an affiliate of the national AFAR organization. "AvMed's generous support of AFAR's Research Grant program will ensure that a highly qualified young Florida-based scientist will be able to pursue vitally-needed aging research in our state."

Dr. Roos added, “As the number of older adults in our state continues to grow, there is a greater need not only to provide high-quality medical care, but also to develop new scientific knowledge about aging processes and age-related diseases and disorders to allow more people to live healthier longer, free of disability. Aging research is about studying the young, before the body breaks down. Scientists search for clues about why we develop disease later in life. This valuable support from AvMed Health Plans will enable more highly qualified Florida-based researchers to pursue research that can benefit all of us as we age.”

The AvMed Health Plans AFAR Florida Research Grant will provide timely support as current cutbacks in federal funding jeopardize the careers of many promising investigators who are working to understand how aging influences disease.

For nearly 30 years, AFAR has supported the science of healthier aging by providing critical start-up grants to promising young researchers, many of whose findings are dramatically changing both our understanding and the practice of medicine.

According to one AFAR Florida researcher, Dave Morgan, Ph.D., who directs the Alzheimer Research Laboratory and Basic Neuroscience Research at the University of South Florida in Tampa, “Almost without exception, AFAR picks the winners. AFAR identifies those scientists who are truly committed – the top 20% that will go on to have highly productive research careers. AFAR has found a special niche by maximizing the use of its funds, moving young scientists into academic research careers.”

Another previous AFAR research grantee, Chad A. Dickey, Ph.D., now an assistant professor at USF’s Johnnie B. Byrd Sr. Alzheimer’s Center and Research Institute, stated, “AFAR is one of the few organizations that realizes that an emphasis on basic science is not only essential, but the key to building the foundation for the future. Many of today’s advances in heart disease and cancer treatments were made possible because of an emphasis on basic science.”

AFAR-supported investigators study a broad range of biomedical and clinical topics including the causes of cellular senescence, the role of estrogen in the development of osteoporosis, the genetic factors associated with Alzheimer’s disease, the effects of nutrition and exercise on the aging process, and much more. Since 1981, the organization has granted approximately \$113 million to nearly 2,500 scientists, advancing our understanding of the

aging process, age-related diseases, and healthy aging practices. Now, with the AvMed Health Plans AFAR Florida Research Grant, Florida researchers have a new avenue of support.

### Summary

The American Federation for Aging Research ([www.afar.org](http://www.afar.org)), with a prestigious four-star rating from Charity Navigator, is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to support biological and biomedical research on aging. The organization is devoted to creating the knowledge that all of us need to live healthy, productive, and independent lives. As part of its mission to improve the health and quality of life of the communities it serves, AvMed Health Plans has joined AFAR Florida in hastening the pace of biomedical research on aging in our state and advancing the science of healthier aging through support of the new AvMed Health Plans AFAR Florida Research Grant.

AvMed Health Plans, one of Florida's oldest and largest not-for-profit health plans, has been serving Floridians for almost 40 years. AvMed offers health coverage options to large and small employers in most major markets around the state, and individual coverage in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. South Florida seniors can access Medicare Advantage and pharmacy coverage through AvMed Medicare Preferred. AvMed is part of the SantaFe Healthcare family of not-for-profits. This Gainesville-based parent company also includes Haven Hospice and SantaFe Senior Living, which operates retirement communities that provide seniors with a continuum of services and varying levels of care in a resort-like setting.

For more information on the AFAR Research Grants program, including eligibility guidelines and deadlines, visit [www.afar.org](http://www.afar.org) or contact Susan Lichtman, AFAR Florida's regional director, at [susan@afar.org](mailto:susan@afar.org) or 305-598-1115.

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