Diabetes researcher brings $389M to USF

BY LISA GREENE
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — Jeffrey Krischer, a diabetes researcher at the University of South Florida who already wears the distinction of earning the school’s largest research grant, has won even more money for USF.
Krischer, a professor of pediatrics, has been awarded a $128-million, seven-year grant from the National Institutes of Health to coordinate worldwide studies on the prevention and treatment of Type 1 diabetes.
That’s on top of the $169-million, 10-year grant that the NIH awarded Krischer last year to study why diabetes rates are rising in young children.
Add those two awards to Krischer’s other grants, and he has brought USF a staggering $558 million. The new grant pushes USF into the top 50 U.S. medical schools receiving NIH funding, USF administrators said.
“Just shows that innovation, focus and creativity — and Dr. Krischer exhibits all three — really can create world-class programs,” said Dr. Stephen Klasko, vice president of USF Health and medical school dean.
“That’s a wonderful, exciting opportunity for us,” Krischer said. “I think it reflects on the quality and strength of the program here.”
By way of comparison, USF’s entire research budget for 2006-07 was $308-million, though Krischer’s new grants are spread over several years.
> See DIABETES 2A

USF diabetes researcher has won $389M in grants

Krischer is haileding in huge research dollars for his specialized skill in using computers to analyze data collected by diabetes researchers all over the world.
The new funding goes toward a study called TrialNet, in which researchers will screen more than 150,000 children and adults. Those with early signs of diabetes may receive new drugs to prevent the disease from progressing.
In Type 1 diabetes, the body stops producing insulin, the hormone that converts sugar to energy. Like the more common Type 2 diabetes, it can cause medical problems that include heart disease, nerve damage, blindness and kidney failure.
Krischer will head the study’s data coordinating and technology center. The study will have research sites around the world.
Krischer also chairs one of the studies in TrialNet. That looks at whether insulin can keep people at risk from getting the disease.
The record-setting study that Krischer won funding for last year, called TEDDY, is screening more than 250,000 newborns in six countries, looking for those who are genetically at high risk to develop Type 1 diabetes.

Researchers then will study those high-risk babies, predicted to number about 8,000, for 15 years. They’ll try to see whether food, illnesses or other factors influence who gets diabetes.
Krischer likes how the two studies move from trying to identify the disease’s causes to prevention and treatment.
“They fit together and complement one another,” he said.
USF officials hailed the latest grant, with Klasko joking that Krischer can have “whatever the heck he wants.” More seriously, he said that the key for Florida schools to keep Krischer and other prominent researchers is to give them the tools and flexibility they need for research.
“I should take him up on that,” Krischer joked back. Then he said the grant award really isn’t about him, or even about his staff, or about USF funding totals.
“I’m happy to support the university,” he said. “But my personal goal is really to talk to somebody and know that I helped them avoid the lifelong suffering and pain of diabetes.”

Lisa Greene can be reached at greeneli@ tampabay.com or (813) 226-3322.

> FAST FACTS

Jeffrey Krischer
Age: 60
Professional: Professor and chair of the biostatistics and informatics division; director of the pediatric epidemiology center at USF.
Grants received includes: $328 million for TEDDY, $169 million for TEDDY study ($163 million in late 2007, $20 million earlier)
Salary: $308,250
Family: Married, two daughters.