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## **Emory Geneticists Play Leading Role in 10<sup>th</sup> International Fragile X Conference in Atlanta, July 19-23**

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ATLANTA--Geneticists from Emory University School of Medicine will play leading roles in the upcoming 10<sup>th</sup> International Fragile X Conference, July 19-23 at the Omni Hotel at CNN Center in Atlanta. Stephen T. Warren, PhD and Stephanie Sherman, PhD--both acclaimed international authorities on fragile X syndrome--will highlight their groundbreaking research over the past two decades. Fragile X is the leading cause of inherited mental retardation and the most common known cause of autism.

Dr. Warren, who is William P. Timmie professor and chairman of the Department of Human Genetics at Emory University School of Medicine, will deliver the conference keynote address. Dr. Sherman, professor of human genetics, and Jeannie Visootsak, PhD, assistant professor of human genetics and developmental pediatrician in Emory's Fragile X Clinic, also will speak at the conference.

The Emory team will highlight the emerging knowledge regarding the causes of fragile X syndrome and new treatments on the horizon, as well as the role fragile X plays in genetically based premature ovarian failure and other fragile X-related carrier issues such as fragile X-associated tremor ataxia syndrome (FXTAS).

In 1991, Dr. Warren led the international team of scientists that discovered the FMR1 gene responsible for fragile X syndrome. In 2003, Emory established the joint Emory/Baylor National Fragile X Center, one of three inaugural centers in the country. With the establishment of the center, Emory became the largest fragile X research

program in the country. Over 200 publications, including the most cited publications on fragile X syndrome, come from Emory University.

"It is quite exciting to have Atlanta as host city for this year's fragile X conference," Dr. Warren said. "Research progress in fragile X has been quite astounding since discovery of the responsible gene in 1991, and we are proud of the leading role played by Emory scientists. We are now able to offer a wide range of clinical services to fragile X patients and carriers, and we are on the verge of breakthrough therapies we believe will radically improve the lives of patients and families dealing with fragile X syndrome."

Dr. Warren and Dr. Sherman both have ongoing research studies that include unraveling the molecular mechanisms of fragile X syndrome to gain new insight into potential therapeutic approaches and understanding of learning, behavior, reproduction, and neurological phenotypes of pre-mutation carriers. Among the ongoing research projects at Emory is the Emory Study of Adult Learning, a federally funded project that examines how the FMR1 gene affects learning and behavior in men and women between the ages of 18 and 50. Another project examines the causes of premature ovarian failure, or menopause before age 40. About 1 percent of women in the general population experience premature ovarian failure compared to about 20 percent of women who are carriers of fragile X. The Emory Study of Learning and Movement, ESLM, focuses on the FMR1 gene and its effect on learning and movement in men and women over age 50.

The Fragile X Syndrome Center at Emory currently offers medical and developmental assessment for newborns to age 18, as well as genetic counseling, referrals, consultations, support groups, educational resources, access to research projects, and treatment and interventional strategies.

The 10th International Fragile X conference also will address such issues as behavior, carrier issues, educational issues and strategies, family issues, genetics, genetic counseling, prenatal issues, psychology, psychopharmacology, screening and prevalence.

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