

# American Cancer Society Awards New Research and Training Grants

## Nation's largest non-government, not-for-profit cancer research funder awards 103 grants totaling nearly \$44 million in first of two cycles for 2016

ATLANTA – April 1, 2016– The American Cancer Society, the largest non-government, not-for-profit funding source of cancer research in the United States, has approved funding for 103 research and training grants totaling nearly \$44 million in the first of two grant cycles for 2016. The grants will fund investigators at 74 institutions across the United States; 95 are new grants while eight are renewals of previous grants. The grants go into effect July 1, 2016.

Among the new awards is a new American Cancer Society Research Professor Award, focusing on immunotherapy. **Thomas Gajewski, MD, PhD of the University of Chicago** will receive the first American Cancer Society-Jules L. Plangere Jr. Family Foundation Professor in Cancer Immunotherapy. Dr. Gajewski's lab will receive \$80,000 per year for five years to study the use of integrative genomics to identify resistance in immunotherapy.

Other highlight of the current cycle:

**Sarah Deng, PhD of New York University School of Medicine** will study a not well-understood DNA repair pathway called alt-NHEJ. Studies suggest that errors by alt-NHEJ may be involved in the progression of cancer, and in shaping the mutational landscape that causes chemotherapy drug resistance.

**Eric Hastie, PhD at Duke University** will study finger-like structures called invadopodia that extend from cells and appear to contribute to metastasis, the process by which cancer spreads throughout the body. His team hopes to advance understanding of the process and potentially lead to new therapeutic strategies to halt invasion in metastatic cancer.

**Kimberly Pyke-Grimm, MN at the University of California, San Francisco:** With her Scholarship Grant, Pyke-Grimm plans to develop a program of research focusing on treatment decision making by Adolescents and Young Adults (AYA) with cancer within the context of family. Cancer will affect approximately 78,800 people between the ages of 15 and 39 years every year in the U.S. Research shows that non-adherence to treatment in AYAs can be as high as 60% and can lead to a higher risk of cancer relapse and even death.

**Eric R. Welin, PhD at the California Institute of Technology** hopes to develop a complete chemical synthesis for jorumycin, a recently-identified compound found in nature that has strong anti-tumor activity. To do the necessary safety and efficacy testing of a cancer drug, a metric ton of biological material would be required to isolate one gram of natural product. In contrast, laboratory synthesis of the compound can readily provide sufficient amounts of the drug candidate for further biological evaluation and testing in people. Jorumycin and possibly analogs might be used for the treatment of breast, lung, liver, colon, ovarian, and other cancers.

**Aimee Lucas, MD, at the Icahn School of Medicine** will lead a team studying pancreatic cancer screening in high-risk individuals. Pancreatic cancer is the fourth leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. Eight out of ten patients are diagnosed late, with inoperable, advanced-stage disease. While screening is not currently recommended in the general population, people at higher risk for pancreatic cancer may benefit from screening. Dr. Lucas and team will evaluate the harms and benefits of pancreas cancer screening in high-risk individuals with the hope of determining the optimal screening strategy for an important and understudied population.

Since 1946, the American Cancer Society has funded research and training of health professionals to investigate the causes, prevention, and early detection of cancer, as well as new treatments, cancer survivorship, and end of life support for patients and their families. In those 70 years, the American Cancer Society's extramural research grants program has devoted more than \$4.3 billion to cancer research and has funded 47 Nobel Prize winners.

The Council for Extramural Research also approved 80 grant applications for funding, totaling nearly \$44 million that could not be funded due to budgetary constraints. These "pay-if" grants represent work that passed the Society's multi-disciplinary review process but are beyond the Society's current funding resources. These "pay-if" grants can be and often are subsidized by donors who wish to support research that would not otherwise be funded. In 2015, more than \$11 million in additional funding helped finance 34 "pay-if" grants.

For more information about the American Cancer Society Research Program, please visit <http://www.cancer.org/research>.

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