American Cancer Society Awards New Research and Training Grants

Nation's largest non-government, not-for-profit cancer research funder awards 93 grants totaling more than $40 million in first of two cycles for 2019

The American Cancer Society, the largest non-government, not-for-profit funding source of cancer research in the United States, has approved funding for 93 research and training grants totaling $40,277,750 in the first of two grant cycles for 2019. The grants will fund investigators at 65 institutions across the United States; 86 are new grants while 7 are renewals of previous grants. All the grants go into effect July 1, 2019.

Highlights of the current cycle:

- **Dirk Hockemeyer, University of California, Berkeley** will investigate the mechanism by which mutations in the telomerase gene result in cancer cell immortality and to what extent these mutations are driving melanoma progression. Telomerase mutations are found in 10-15% of all cancers and in 70% of melanomas.
- **Taru Muranen, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center** in Boston, Mass., will utilize patient-derived pancreatic cancer organoids (so-called as they are considered mini-organs) together with stromal cells to identify effective drug combinations that could enhance the effectiveness of current therapies in pancreatic cancer, one of the most lethal types of cancer
- **Daniel R. Wahl of the University of Michigan** is studying the factors that make glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) brain tumors resistant to radiation. The aim is to inhibit certain metabolic pathways that appear altered in cancer cells to make radiation treatments more effective.
- **Tyler Risom of Stanford University** will lead a project that seeks to identify which ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) tumors will progress to invasive breast cancer using a new microscope technology: Multiplexed Ion Beam Imaging (MIBI), which allows 40+ distinct protein markers to be seen simultaneously within a single tumor image. The work has the potential to greatly reduce patient over-treatment and expand the availability of effective drugs for the patients that need it.
- **Avonne Connor of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health**, Baltimore Md. Will investigate the roles of tumor type, overall health status, and socioeconomic status on outcomes for African American and Hispanic breast cancer survivors.

Health Professional Training grants include:

- Two new sites were awarded Training Grants in Clinical Oncology Social Work, The **University of Rochester** and **Thomas Jefferson University**. Four other sites successfully renewed their existing support. The grants train second-year master's students to provide psychosocial services to cancer patients and their families.
- Twelve new grants to support doctoral study were awarded to ten oncology nurses and two oncology social workers. **Matthew LeBlanc of Duke University**, Durham, N.C. will work to identify needs among a newly growing group of cancer survivors: those with multiple myeloma. New treatments have led to impressive survival gains. This extended survival comes at a cost; patients are on perpetual treatment as they consistently transition to new medications when previous therapies stop working. He expects that findings from the study will help direct future research, intervention development, and clinical practice.

The American Cancer Society Extramural Research program currently supports research and training in a wide range of cancer-related disciplines at more than 200 institutions. With an investment of more than $4.8 billion since 1946, the ACS is the largest private, not-for-profit source of cancer research funds in the U.S., and has funded 47 researchers who have gone on to be awarded the Nobel Prize. The program primarily funds early career investigators, giving the best and the brightest a chance to explore cutting-edge ideas at a time when they might not find funding elsewhere. In addition, the Extramural Research program focuses on needs that are unmet by other funding organizations.

The Council for Extramural Research also approved 101 grant applications for funding, totaling $47,290,250 that

could not be funded due to budgetary constraints. These “pay-if” applications represent work that passed the Society’s multi-disciplinary review process but are beyond the Society’s current funding resources. They can be and often are subsidized by donors who wish to support research that would not otherwise be funded. In 2018, more than $7 million in additional funding helped finance 32 “pay-if” applications.

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

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