American Cancer Society Awards Research Grants to 133 Investigators at 84 Institutions Nationwide

Atlanta 2008/04/14 -The American Cancer Society, the largest non-government, not-for-profit funding source of cancer research in the United States, has awarded 133 national research and training grants totaling more than $54 million in the second of two grant cycles for 2008. Of the grants, 118 are new and 15 are renewals of previous grants. All of the grants go into effect July 1, 2008.

“We are once again proud to be funding very promising new research into some key areas,” said Margaret K. Offermann, MD, PhD, American Cancer Society deputy national vice president for research. “Among our grants is what is thought to be the largest research grant to date on Merkel cell cancer, a very deadly and yet rarely studied form of skin cancer, as well as a grant to evaluate a new computer aided CT colonography method that eliminates the need for the bowel prep prior to evaluation. Bowel prep has been identified as a major barrier to colon cancer screening, and this approach might dramatically increase compliance with American Cancer Society screening guidelines.”

The American Cancer Society’s Research and Training Program has funded 42 Nobel Prize laureates since its inception in 1946, during which time it has invested over $3.2 billion in cancer research, much of that focusing on the work of promising new investigators. On April 1, 2008, the Society was funding 938 multi-year grants worth $458 million. Among the newly awarded grants approved for funding beginning July 1, 2008:

THREE NEW AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY CLINICAL RESEARCH PROFESSORS

- Ethan Dmitrovsky, MD, professor and director of pharmacology and toxicology at the Dartmouth Medical School in Lebanon, New Hampshire, will test the efficacy of attacking lung cancer by targeting a group of proteins known as cyclins. These cell cycle proteins are overexpressed in premalignant and malignant lung lesions in patients.
- James Ferrara, MD, director of the Combined Blood and Marrow Transplant Program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor is investigating ways to make bone marrow transplant safer. He is looking for genetic biomarkers that will identify patients most likely to develop graft-vs-host disease.
- Jennifer Grandis, MD, F.A.C.S. of the University of Pittsburgh is studying head and neck squamous cell carcinoma while looking at the underlying genetic abnormalities in an individual’s cancer that could identify new therapeutic targets for the successful treatment of each individual patient’s cancer, a personalized medicine approach . Dr. Grandis will become the first American Cancer Society - Genentech BioOncology Clinical Research Professor for Translational Research.

Research Scholar Grants

- Paul Nghiem, MD, PhD of the University of Washington in Seattle will use data from over 6,000 patients diagnosed with a type of skin cancer called Merkel cell carcinoma to develop a staging system for this disease that will better define prognosis and standardize future clinical trials for Merkel cell carcinoma as his laboratory studies specific genes involved in this disease.
- Shile Huang, PhD of Louisiana State University is studying a compound found in the curry spice tumeric called curcumin, which is now in early clinical trials as an anticancer agent that can be used to treat and/or prevent various types of human cancers.
- Douglas Roblin, PhD at the Kaiser Health Plan of Georgia, is researching a concern that new insurance plans that increase patient cost-sharing for medical services might cause patients to delay or defer recommended receipt of cancer prevention services which, in the long term, might increase cancer incidence. The grant was awarded in response to a special nationwide request for research in the area of

health insurance.

- Pamela Short, PhD of Pennsylvania State University will investigate the long-term effects of cancer survivorship on several important employment outcomes, including hours of work, wages, and annual earnings for both men and women at different ages with a wide variety of cancers in efforts to better meet survivors' needs.
- Eric Sweet-Cordero, MD of Stanford University will use a mouse model system genetically designed to study human lung cancer to discern why some lung tumors become resistant to cisplatin chemotherapy.
- Michael Zalis, M.D of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston is addressing a major discomfort and barrier to colon cancer screening by refining a new method to detect colon cancer using a computer-aided form of Virtual Colonoscopy as it is called, which would eliminates the need for the bowel cleansing preparation.

Pilot and Exploratory Projects

- In response to a special nationwide search for meritorious Palliative Care research nationwide, grantee Joan Teno, MD of Brown University will examine any perceived variations in quality of care for cancer patients referred to hospice in the last weeks of life as seen by the hospice providers versus bereaved family members.

Grant applications are ranked on the basis of merit by one of several discipline-specific Peer Review Committees, each of which is composed of 12 to 25 scientific advisors or peers who are experts in their fields. The Council for Extramural Grants, a committee of senior scientists, recommends funding based on the relative merit of the applications, the amount of available funds, and the Society's objectives. No member of the American Cancer Society's Board of Directors or National Assembly may serve on a Peer Review Committee or as a voting member on the Council for Extramural Grants.

The Council for Extramural Grants also approved 95 research grant applications 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 go beyond the Society's current funding resources, and which will be funded of additional monies become available. "These grants serve as an important reminder that there continues to be promising research we would like to fund but cannot with our current resources," said Dr. Offermann.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

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