

American Cancer Society Receives \$8.5 Million Contribution

Anonymous Individual Gift to Target Thyroid Cancer Research

Atlanta 2008/07/30 -The American Cancer Society, the nation's largest voluntary health organization, has received a gift of \$8.5 million from a single anonymous donor. The contribution, one of the largest individual scientific research gifts in the Society's 95-year history, will be earmarked for targeted investigation into a genetic disorder that leads to a high lifetime risk of several types of cancer, most often thyroid cancer.

In keeping with the American Cancer Society's successful approach of funding beginning investigators, the gift will establish a consortium of young scientists and guide their research to better understand the origins of the genetic disorder Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia type 2 (MEN2) and the ret proto-oncogene gene (commonly called the RET gene), which is mutated in people who inherit this syndrome, predisposing carriers to cancer.

John R. Seffrin, PhD, national chief executive officer of the Society, said the new targeted research will increase knowledge that should substantially benefit the Society's goal of saving more lives, preventing more cancer and gaining new resources to empower more people to fight back against the disease. "The American Cancer Society is the largest private nonprofit source of cancer research funds in the United States. This extraordinary gift will most certainly hasten our progress toward our ultimate goal of eliminating cancer as a major health problem," Seffrin said.

The gift will establish the MEN2 Thyroid Cancer Consortium, comprising 12 outstanding junior investigators selected through the American Cancer Society's stringent peer review process, along with a renowned senior scientist who will lead the consortium. The five-year research program is expected to begin in July 2009.

"One of the most successful ways to leverage research dollars is through collaborative research programs, which focus the efforts of multiple scientists on a common problem," said Otis W. Brawley, MD, the Society's chief medical officer. "The Society, with its demonstrated success in this area, will identify some of the most talented and innovative scientists in the U.S. and facilitate their collaborative focus on this serious clinical issue."

Harnessing the combined horsepower of a consortium of scientists to examine the MEN2 puzzle will increase the potential for immediate success in improving thyroid cancer screening, monitoring and diagnosis. The consortium's work will also support the probability of long-term impact as it seeks to uncover the underlying reasons for the RET mutation's inducement of the MEN2 syndrome.

Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia (MEN) is a syndrome associated with tumors in two or more endocrine tissues. Of the six known MEN syndromes, type-2 (MEN2) is one of the most common. It is associated with high levels of the hormone calcitonin; tumors of the thyroid, parathyroid, adrenal gland and nervous tissue; and mutations in the RET gene. More than 25 mutations in the RET gene are known to cause MEN2, and most of these mutations change single protein building blocks (amino acids) in the RET protein.

Mutations responsible for MEN2 result in an overactive RET protein that can transmit signals without first attaching to growth factors outside the cell. The overactive protein may trigger cells to grow and divide abnormally, which can lead to the formation of tumors in the endocrine system and other tissues. The abnormal gene is inherited and affects about one in 20,000 people. Of the approximately 37,000 new thyroid cancers expected to be diagnosed in 2008, about 950 will be in patients with MEN2.

The American Cancer Society is the nationwide community-based voluntary health organization 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, Georgia, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across America. For more information on the American Cancer Society, please visit www.cancer.org.

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