American Cancer Society Awards 131 New Research and Career Development Grants Totaling $64.5 Million

Nation's largest non-government, non-profit funder of cancer research also announces recipients of the ACS Research Professor Award

ATLANTA, November 13, 2023 – The [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS), the largest non-government, non-profit funding source of cancer research in the United States, has approved funding for 131 new Extramural Discovery Science (EDS) research and career development grants totaling $64.5 million. The grants will fund investigators at 72 institutions across the United States starting in 2024.

"The ACS is very proud to be able to offer these grants to help fund more than one hundred incredibly important areas of study," said [Dr. Christina Annunziata](#), senior vice president, extramural discovery science at the American Cancer Society. "These scientists are working on groundbreaking research to understand biological processes of cancer, identify new treatments for patients, and optimize care for survivors."

ACS seeks to improve the lives of cancer patients, families, and caregivers through research, patient services, and advocacy. To maximize impact, ACS has established six priority research areas to advance our mission to reduce the cancer burden in the U.S.: etiology or causes of cancer, obesity/healthy eating and active living, screening and diagnosis, treatment, survivorship, and health equity across the cancer continuum. These topics will require fundamental, preclinical, clinical, population, and implementation/dissemination research as well as multidisciplinary team science to tackle the complexities of cancers and cancer care.

"Funding the most innovative cancer research helps save lives," said [Dr. William Dahut](#), chief scientific officer at the American Cancer Society. "These new grantees are on track to advance cancer prevention, detection, and treatment and we are excited to be a part of moving our collective mission forward."

ACS is excited to announce two new recipients of the ACS Research Professor Award. The ACS Research Professor Award is a highly prestigious award for investigators who have made seminal contributions in cancer research. The award also recognizes exceptional track records in leadership, service, and mentoring in cancer research.

ACS PROFESSOR AWARDS

Edna Cukierman, Ph.D.
The ACS-Wilmott Family Professorship in Pancreatic Cancer Research
The Research Institute of Fox Chase Cancer Center
Co-Director, Marvin & Concetta Greenberg Pancreatic Cancer Institute
Enabling the best minds to tackle the pancreatic cancer microenvironment

This proposal aims to better understand the unique biology of pancreatic cancer neighboring cells that regulate the immune system and nurture cancer to improve the ability to detect and treat this high-mortality cancer. Dr. Cukierman's strategic plan focuses on closing underrepresented trainees' educational gaps and supporting individuals who would otherwise not have the opportunity to conduct pancreatic cancer research at the highest level. This professorship was made possible through the generosity of Timothy Wilmott and Dr. Nancy Barna.

J. Silvio Gutkind, Ph.D.
ACS Research Professor

University of California San Diego
Member, National Academy of Medicine
Multimodal Precision Cancer Targeted and Immunotherapies

The goal of this research program is to develop novel multimodal precision therapies and immunotherapies for the treatment of cancer. The proposed strategic plan aims to address the limitations of current targeted therapies and immunotherapies by exploring combinatorial approaches and identifying resistance mechanisms. Dr. Gutkind has advanced mentoring initiatives to not only make significant contributions to cancer treatment and research, but also fostering diversity in the field.

Highlights in the current grant cycle from the six research funding priority areas include:

ETIOLOGY
Marcus Ruscetti, Ph.D.
University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School
Uncovering the heterogenous role of senescence in prostate immune suppression and tumorigenesis
Research Scholar Grant

Cellular senescence is a regulatory program that stops cells from multiplying and is an important mechanism for removal by the immune system to prevent cancer. However, it can also promote tumor progression and immune suppression if it is not controlled. This project will test the hypothesis that senescent cells promote prostate immune suppression and tumorigenesis and targeting the senescent program can reactivate immune-mediated tumor control. A combination approach will be tested in preclinical models of prostate tumorigenesis using senolytic agents with existing immunotherapies.

OBESITY/HEALTHY EATING & ACTIVE LIVING
Patricia Wolf, Ph.D., RDN
Purdue University
The food environment, microbial cysteine metabolism, and cancer disparities
Research Scholar Grant

Social structural barriers to accessing quality foods leads may contribute to colorectal cancer inequities observed in African Americans/Blacks. This proposal examines social determinants of health (economic barriers, neighborhood food environment, and exposure to psychosocial stress), dietary intake, and host and microbial cysteine metabolism that may contribute to colorectal cancer disparities in African Americans/Blacks. Cysteine is commonly added as a dough conditioner and flavor component to ultra-processed foods.

SCREENING & DIAGNOSIS
David Wong, DMD
University of California, Los Angeles
Novel liquid biopsy biomarkers for oral cancer progression and recurrence
Screening Priority Area RFA – Research Scholar Grant

Oral squamous cell carcinoma (OSCC) is quite lethal (5-year survival of 60%), and the current screening steps are visual and tactile exam and biopsy. However, these current screening methods cannot predict which premalignant lesions progress to OSCC, which leads to either aggressive surgeries that are unnecessary for all patients or watching, waiting, and constantly screening to see if the premalignant lesions have progressed. The objective of this proposal is to identify biomarkers in the serum of patients with premalignant lesions and OSCC to develop a blood-based test that can identify patients with high-risk lesions to treat them more aggressively than patients who don't have high-risk lesions.

TREATMENT

Arthur Tinoco, Ph.D.
University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras Campus
Bimetal compounds that synergize cytotoxic metals and dual intracellular chelation of copper and irons
Discovery Boost Grant

There is a pressing need to improve cancer treatments, especially for hard-to-treat, notoriously chemotherapeutic-resistant cancers like non-small cell lung cancer. This proposal seeks to design broad-spectrum chemo drugs by expanding the knowledge of cell death pathways and exploring how metal chemistry can be tuned to turn on these pathways to attack lung cancer cells.

SURVIVORSHIP

Avonne Connor, Ph.D.
Johns Hopkins University
The use of social networks to enhance breast cancer survivorship research among Black women in Maryland: Establishing a cohort study
Research Scholar Grant

Black breast cancer (BC) patients have the highest BC mortality rates and shortest overall survival relative to other racial/ethnic groups of BC patients in the U.S. This project evaluates the relationships between cancer-related factors at the time of diagnosis, social factors, and survivorship care plans on health outcomes among Black BC survivors.

HEALTH EQUITY ACROSS THE CANCER CONTINUUM

Travis Baggett M.D., MPH
Massachusetts General Hospital
Patient navigation to promote cancer health equity at Health Care for the Homeless programs
Research Scholar Grant

Each year, over 1.25 million people experience homelessness in the U.S. These individuals have higher rates of cancer, more difficulty completing cancer screening, and more barriers to cancer care than non-homeless people. Patient navigation is a strategy designed to reduce these types of disparities by guiding patients through complex health systems and removing barriers to timely cancer screening and treatment. This project utilizes implementation science research methods to better understand how patient navigation can be deployed in homeless-experienced patients and ultimately promote health equity in a highly marginalized patient population.

The ACS Extramural Discovery Science program currently supports more than 700 research grants across the cancer continuum at more than 200 institutions. With an investment of more than five billion dollars since 1946, the ACS has funded 50 researchers who have gone on to be awarded the Nobel Prize. ACS funds many 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.

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About the American Cancer Society
The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 100 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

For further information: American Cancer Society, Anne.Doerr@cancer.org

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