



SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL FOUNDATION | UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CARY COUNCIL MARKS 5th ANNIVERSARY VIA VIRTUAL CELEBRATION

Members raise nearly \$100K for three promising UT Southwestern Early-Stage Research Investigators; Recipients join six other awardees for a total of \$6.8 million in follow-on funding to date

DALLAS – Dec. 16, 2020 – Furthering innovation in medicine at a critical time, the [Cary Council](#) has named its three new grant awardees for 2020 – each with a different clinical focus but united by a single purpose: to explore new evidence-based pathways to treating some of the world’s most intractable illnesses.

Attendees of the Council’s recent virtual kick-off event heard from the three awardees as they explained their research areas and the promise held by their funding. Consisting of emerging young leaders who support the missions of Southwestern Medical Foundation and UT Southwestern Medical Center, the Cary Council, in naming this year’s grant awardees, continues its tradition of supporting early-career investigators with seed funding that can be leveraged when applying for other grants.

This year’s winners from UT Southwestern – [Olutoyosi “Toy” Ogunkua, M.D.](#), [Chika Nwachukwu, M.D., Ph.D.](#), and [Luis Sifuentes-Dominguez, M.D.](#) – bring the total number grants awarded by the Council since its founding five years ago to nine.

Dr. Ogunkua’s research focuses on maternal bleeding and hemorrhage and aims to limit the hemorrhaging women can have after caesarian section by studying the use of tranexamic acid prophylactically in clinical trials. Dr. Nwachukwu’s focus is on gynecologic cancer, women’s health, and global oncology initiatives, and her work will focus on identifying high-risk cervical cancer patients who could be candidates for more aggressive treatments. Dr. Luis Sifuentes-Dominguez is studying basic mechanisms of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Using cutting-edge genomic approaches, he has helped identify novel genes that play a role in early-onset IBD and will continue studying the interaction of the environment with genes associated with IBD.

[Read more about The Cary Council's 2020 Grant Recipients](#) | [VIDEO](#)

Seeds for Further Funding

While the curative effects of the research are potentially still years away, the multiplier effect of funding from the Cary Council has been proven.

Dr. Prasanna Alluri, who was a finalist in 2018 for his work in building targeted therapies to overcome treatment-resistant breast cancer, recently received a \$1.5 million grant from the Department of Defense's Breast Cancer Research Program to develop new treatments for breast cancer patients who have become resistant to existing systemic therapies.

"This work is a direct extension of the work funded by my DocStar award," Dr. Alluri said. "The support from the Cary Council was instrumental in helping me receive federal funding for our research programs. I am extremely grateful for this critical support at an early stage in my career."

Dr. Alluri is just one example of a success that has been repeated by other grant recipients before him, such as Drs. Jacques Lux and Richard Wang, who gave updates on their research to the Cary Council its recent Fall 2020 Kick-Off and Five-Year Anniversary Celebration. Drs. Lux and Wang offered the Council a progress report on work that has grown out of their 2017 grants.

Dr. Lux is pursuing a treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) – the most common pediatric cancer, accounting for one quarter of all cancers in children. Current treatments are highly allergenic in 30 percent of children, leading to serious side effects. Dr. Lux and his colleagues have found a way to "hide" an anti-cancer enzyme in nanoparticles undetectable by the immune system to avoid an allergic reaction, while at the same time starving the cancer cells of an important amino acid needed to proliferate. "We want to find a better way to deliver life-saving drugs to all children," Dr. Lux said. He noted that \$50,000 from the Cary Council has been leveraged into more than \$1.5 million to develop new enzyme-based nanomedicines.

Dr. Wang explained how a better understanding of glucose transport will lead to new therapeutics. His research has shown that the GLUT transporter (glucose transporter) is highly expressed in blood and skin cells. By disrupting the function of GLUT transporters in skin cells, new treatments are emerging for psoriasis. Extending the studies to discover more potent inhibitors of the GLUT transporter could also lead to new treatments of non-melanoma skin cancer, he said. Among other grants, his funding from the Cary Council has led to a National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases R01 Award of \$1.8 million over five years.

In total, the Cary Council's six grant recipients named in previous years have received \$6.8 million in follow-on grants, according to Michael Kahn, Founding Chairman of the Cary Council.

“We are thrilled with the early success,” Kahn said, “Our hope is the DocStars seed capital helps motivate these talented UT Southwestern Young Investigators to stay local – and ultimately drives future scientific discoveries at UT Southwestern.”

[New Leadership Welcomed During Virtual Celebration](#)

Amanda George, the new incoming Chair of the Council, thanked Kahn for his boundless energy and tireless work in forming the group, which began with his late mother’s battle with glioblastoma – and a dream to honor her memory in a way that engages the community to fuel progress in leading-edge science. “What began with one member, Michael, is now a thriving community organization dedicated to supporting innovation at UT Southwestern powered by the steadfast support of the Southwestern Medical Foundation,” she said.

“These wonderful leaders carry on an extraordinary tradition of philanthropic support, which is the cornerstone of medical excellence in Dallas,” Gibson said. “Philanthropy is vital in advancing early-stage research, which may be too nascent to attract other funding sources. So it has been rewarding to see the Cary Council’s previous grant recipients demonstrating tremendous and tangible results. We could not be more proud of the Cary Council for seeing the importance of support for young investigators.”

[Learn more about The Cary Council’s journey of growth over the past five years.](#)

Kahn emphasized the importance of continuing to attract new members.

“We have always thought about impact from two vantage points: community and research,” Kahn said. “In a post vaccine world, the importance of research, education and care in our backyard is increasingly clear.”

Attended by leaders of UT Southwestern and the Southwestern Medical Foundation, the celebration featured video vignettes of the three grant recipients chosen this year by the Council’s Steering Committee. UT Southwestern President Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky and Foundation President & CEO Kathleen M. Gibson attended the event to show their support of the Council and wish the three new awardees well as they continue their research.

“I would like to reflect on what we’ve seen from the first two rounds of grant recipients, who have been supported through the generosity of the Cary Council,” said Dr. Podolsky. “When you consider that they represent the leverage of \$300,000 in initial funding into nearly \$7 million, that’s a pretty exceptional return on investment, and it says a lot about the ability of the Cary Council to really see the talent and potential of these researchers.”

To learn more about the Cary Council’s 2020 grant recipients, please [click here](#).

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ABOUT THE CARY COUNCIL

The Cary Council is dedicated to carrying on Dr. Edward H. Cary's legacy to "inspire a great citizenship to greater deeds." In September 2015, Southwestern Medical Foundation and UT Southwestern launched The Cary Council, a group of emerging community leaders, whose mission is to support and strengthen the work of the Foundation and Medical Center. The Council was created to educate the next generation about the critical role medical research, education, and patient care plays in improving our health and making Dallas a world-class city.

ABOUT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL FOUNDATION

Southwestern Medical Foundation, founded in 1939, is a public charitable corporation and registered 501(c)(3) organization inspiring and advancing progress in medicine. The Foundation connects the vision of donors with innovative programs and serves as a sustainable funding source for leading-edge research, medical education, and patient care. In leading the health care mission forward, the Foundation is guided by four building standards: Service to Community, Vision of Excellence, Mindful Stewardship, and Best Outcomes. Each principle is a promise to donors, beneficiaries, and generations to come, assuring that Foundation is positioned to provide sustained funding for medical progress in our community and the world beyond. Southwestern Medical Foundation's significant financial health and dedication to transparency have earned the Guidestar Platinum Seal and a Charity Navigator 100/100 Encompass Rating.

ABOUT UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER

UT Southwestern, one of the premier academic medical centers in the nation, integrates pioneering biomedical research with exceptional clinical care and education. The institution's faculty has received six Nobel Prizes, and includes 23 members of the National Academy of Sciences, 17 members of the National Academy of Medicine, and 13 Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigators. The full-time faculty of more than 2,500 is responsible for groundbreaking medical advances and is committed to translating science-driven research quickly to new clinical treatments. UT Southwestern physicians provide care in about 80 specialties to more than 105,000 hospitalized patients, nearly 370,000 emergency room cases, and oversee approximately 3 million outpatient visits a year.