

Grant Awarded to Fund Promising New Research into Enhancing Efficacy of Immunotherapy

(NEW YORK, March 17, 2020) – Cedars Sinai's Dr. YanYi Jiang, Postdoctoral Scientist and [Dr. H. Phillip Koeffler](#), Mark Goodson Chair in Oncology Research at [Cedars-Sinai](#) in Los Angeles, have been awarded \$150,000 by [The DeGregorio Family Foundation](#) and the Price Family Foundation.

This grant will support research that seeks to uncover a new understanding both theoretically and clinically as to the manner by which esophageal squamous cell carcinoma (ESCC) cells can escape targeting by immune surveillance—thereby potentially leading to enhanced efficacy of immunotherapy as a treatment option for esophageal cancer patients.



ESCC is the most aggressive and common form of esophageal cancer, accounting for about 90% of all new incidents each year¹. With a dearth of therapeutic strategies, patients face poor prognoses with five-year survival rates of less than 20%.



This generous award will help us expand knowledge of how esophageal squamous cell carcinoma cells evade detection.

-Dr. YanYi Jiang

This research team has recently determined the genomic landscape of ESCC and identified a number of driver events, one of the most notable of which is the overexpression and hyperactivation of the ESCC-specific transcription factor TP63. Importantly, interferon- α/γ signaling pathways were identified as the most significantly enriched pathways suppressed by TP63. Given the prominent and indispensable role of interferon signaling in antitumor immunity, the research team hypothesizes that TP63 facilitates immune evasion of ESCC cells by suppressing interferon-signaling pathways and antigen-presentation process. Inhibition of TP63 activity may thus enhance the efficacy of immunotherapy of ESCC.

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With this grant, Drs. Jiang and Koeffler will look to uncover the mechanisms underlying TP63-inhibited immune evasion and provide novel immunotherapeutic options by exploiting TP63-interferon pathways. Their goal is to reveal a new understanding both theoretically and clinically of the manner by which cancer cells can escape immune surveillance.

The DeGregorio Family Foundation, founded in 2006 after a 10th member of the DeGregorio family died of stomach cancer, has raised close to \$4 million to fund innovative research focused on curing gastric and esophageal cancers. Lynn DeGregorio, President and Founder, stated, "With the unprecedented growth in esophageal cancer diagnoses, more needs to be done to support nascent but promising research focused on a cure. We are proud to announce that we are funding the innovative research of Drs. Jiang and Koeffler in their efforts to find new therapeutic strategies for esophageal cancer patients."

Commenting on his award, Dr. Jiang said, "Dr. Koeffler and I are very grateful for this generous award from [The DeGregorio Family Foundation](#), which will help us expand knowledge of how esophageal squamous cell carcinoma cells evade detection. We hope to use this knowledge to open new pathways to immunotherapies for patients."



The DeGregorio Family Foundation funds innovative research focused on curing gastric and esophageal cancers—[click here to donate](#) and...

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¹ Abnet, Christian C. et al., Epidemiology of Esophageal Squamous Cell Carcinoma, *Gastroenterology*, Volume 154, Issue 2, Pages 360 - 373, [https://www.gastrojournal.org/article/S0016-5085\(17\)36039-0/fulltext](https://www.gastrojournal.org/article/S0016-5085(17)36039-0/fulltext)