

New Grant Seeks to Transform Patient Care and Leapfrog Drug Development for Gastroesophageal Cancers

(NEW YORK, March 24, 2021) – [The DeGregorio Family Foundation](#), with funding support from the [Esophageal Cancer Awareness Association](#), has awarded \$230,000 to Dr. Manish Shah, Chief of the Solid Tumor Oncology Service and Director of the Gastrointestinal Oncology Program at Weill Cornell Medicine.

Dr. Shah is an experienced clinical and translational investigator focusing on the diagnosis and management of gastroesophageal cancers. He has examined the biology of gastroesophageal cancers to better understand the biological drivers of the disease in an effort to develop better treatment algorithms. Over his career, he has been involved in many of the major breakthroughs that have informed the management of gastroesophageal cancers.



In 2020, gastroesophageal cancers combined to kill over 1.3 million people worldwide—making it the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths. Patients continue to face poor prognoses following such diagnoses due to their chemo-resistant behavior and ability to metastasize.



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-Dr. Manish Shah

This grant will enable Dr. Shah and his team to leverage cutting-edge technology to examine patient-derived tumor organoids (PTDOs) on a high-throughput robotic drug screening platform. Doing so has the potential to transform patient care and leapfrog drug development for gastroesophageal cancers. Instead of a series of trials taking 10-plus years to come to fruition, novel treatment strategies could more immediately be identified, and more refined clinical studies could proceed. This could shorten the timeframe in drug development and in turn help more patients in an accelerated manner.

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The promise of precision medicine has not yet manifested in routine clinical care despite improvements in sequencing technologies. One of the biggest hopes of performing next-generation sequencing on a patient's tumor is that a new pathway might be identified that can be targeted. Unfortunately, due to the complexity of the genetic code, cancers' numerous mutations, and other changes in cancer cells, sequencing alone has rarely led to the identification of a new treatment. Dr. Shah seeks to overcome this limitation by performing hundreds of drug screens of patients' tumors which have been grown in special three-dimensional tumor organoids. Coupled with pre-clinical and clinical validation, this could be a powerful and transformative resource for patients with cancer.

The DeGregorio Family Foundation, founded in 2006 after a 10th member of the DeGregorio family died of gastroesophageal cancer, has raised close to \$4 million to fund innovative research focused on curing gastroesophageal cancers. Lynn DeGregorio, President and Founder, stated, "We are very excited to be in a position to fund Dr. Shah's work. He is a pioneer in gastroesophageal cancer research and an empathetic clinician who has cared for my family and friends. This research project is positioned to advance the science and truly help patients facing this terribly deadly disease."

Commenting on his award, Dr. Shah said, "We are very excited to embark on this project which we hope will be transformative for patients with gastroesophageal cancers" said Dr. Shah, who is also the Bartlett Family Professor in Gastrointestinal Oncology and a member of the Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Center at Weill Cornell Medicine. "Not only will we learn a lot about the sensitivity of a number of gastroesophageal tumor organoids across a large panel of drugs, but we will test the fact that we can do this in real time so that patients can have new treatment options available to them when they need them."



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

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