

Advances Made in Grant to Improve Immunotherapy in Gastroesophageal Cancer

NEW YORK, Feb. 7, 2024 – [The DeGregorio Family Foundation](#) with support from the Torrey Coast Foundation Gastro Esophageal Investigator Network Initiative ([GEMINI](#)) has awarded \$300,000 to Eric Smith, MD, PhD, and Andrew Aguirre, MD, PhD, both of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and Sam Klempner, MD, Massachusetts General Hospital, to reward the progress they have made on their grant in a little over a year. This is in addition to the \$250,000 awarded in November 2022. They are making strides in their objective of improving immunotherapy in gastroesophageal cancer by identifying and characterizing additional target antigens for next-generation cellular therapies. Depending on results, this grant funding could increase up to \$1 million.

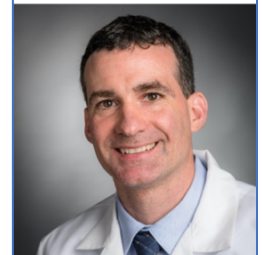
Traditional chemotherapies have had limited success in treating advanced gastric and esophageal cancers. Immunotherapies, including cellular therapies, hold the potential to search throughout a patient and destroy all cancer cells, thus leading to long-standing remissions or even cures. Immunotherapies are now being explored in a variety of cancer types.

One immunotherapy that has shown very positive results in blood cancers is Chimeric Antigen Receptor (CAR) T cell therapy. Ongoing CAR T cell trials in gastric and esophageal adenocarcinomas (GEA) targeting a highly expressed antigen called CLDN18.2 have been successful in inducing tumor regressions in patients. However, responses are not long-lasting and patients usually relapse.

The team is using gastroesophageal adenocarcinoma (GEA) patient tumor samples to investigate the expression of two different cell surface target that include CLDN18.2. In parallel, they are developing and optimizing a dual-targeted CAR T therapy that can engage either of these two targets and are evaluating its effectiveness and safety in pre-clinical models of GEA. Their objective is to translate this novel dual CAR T therapy to the clinic with the goal of obtaining more durable responses and ultimately cures for GEA patients.



Dr. Eric Smith



Dr. Andrew Aguirre



Dr. Sam Klempner



We appreciate the DeGregorio Family Foundation's continued support for our efforts to develop novel immunotherapy options for patients with gastric and esophageal cancers. This unwavering support will directly result in the development of new therapies for patients.

- Drs. Smith, Aguirre & Klempner

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Contact:
Lynn DeGregorio
President & Founder
212-616-7755
lynn@degregorio.org



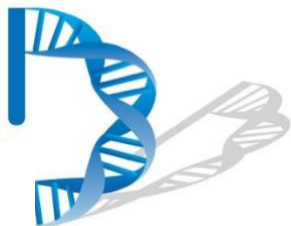
“We appreciate the DeGregorio Family Foundation’s continued support for our efforts to develop novel immunotherapy options for patients with gastric and esophageal cancers,” said Drs. Smith, Aguirre and Klempner in a statement. “This unwavering support will directly result in the development of new therapies for patients.”

“We are indeed proud to play a part in the development of the next-generation cellular therapy for gastroesophageal cancer by Drs. Smith, Aguirre and Klempner,” concluded Lynn DeGregorio, President and Founder.

In 2020, gastric and esophageal cancers combined killed over 1.3 million people worldwide. Patients continue to face poor prognoses following gastric and esophageal cancer diagnoses due to their chemo-resistant behavior and ability to metastasize.

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute provides expert cancer care while advancing the understanding of cancer and related diseases. The Institute focuses on training new generations of clinicians and scientists, disseminating innovative patient therapies and scientific discoveries around the world, and reducing the impact of cancer.

The DeGregorio Family Foundation, founded in 2006 after a 10th member of the DeGregorio family died of stomach cancer, has raised more than \$8 million to fund innovative research to cure gastric and esophageal cancers. It is the only public foundation focused on funding research grants for both of these cancers.



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

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