Welcome to our eighth edition of BRIghtLights!

Our quarterly newsletter brings you information about how your support is helping us reach our goal to end blood disease as we know it. This edition highlights current research in our Translational Glycomics Center and introduces you to our newest researcher, Dr. John A. Pulikkan.

Imagine Gala Raises Money for Research; Honors Thomas Hauske

The 2018 Imagine Gala welcomed 200 guests to the Intercontinental Hotel in downtown Milwaukee on Thursday, September 20th. Generous benefactors helped raise more than $200,000 for research into understanding blood diseases and how to treat them. Versiti board member Thomas Hauske received the Virginia Brooks Jefferson Award for his contributions to and support of our life-saving research mission.

Gala sponsors this year included: Emtec, Fresenius Kabi, the Hauske Family Foundation, Lindsay’s Voice, Meijer, Blackthorne Partners, Direct Supply, Foley & Lardner LLP, Froedtert Hospital/Medical College of Wisconsin, Godfrey & Kahn, Harwood Engineering, Stalle Realty Group, & Kloter Williams Realty, Peter & Joan Ziegler, Grant Thornton, SVA, Mediware, and Cleary Gull.

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Blood Center Research Foundations | How you can help make success possible

Discovering and Innovating Fund
Your gift here fuels innovation, technology, and foundational research that leads to discovering answers to what causes diseases of the blood.

Improving Care and Sharing Fund
Your gift here supports clinically-based research and medical trials, and allows us to share what we learn for improving patient care and outcomes with other healthcare organizations.

Leading and Training Fund
Your gift here assists fellowships, professional development, visiting scholars, and our program aimed at educating and training the next generation of researchers and clinical experts.

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Where Your Money Goes When You Donate a Financial Gift to the Blood Research Institute

• To support Cell-Therapy Research designed to fight disease using your own immune cells
• To support the fight against cancer by helping to launch the Blood Research Institute’s Sheikh Salleh Cell-Anemia disease
• To support research that keeps infant heartbeat strong
• To support designer platelet creation to win the fight against certain bleeding disorders such as hemophilia

BloodCenter of Wisconsin awarded $55 million NIH grants for Career Development in Glycosciences

New national training program aims to mainstream glycosciences; train next generation of researchers

BloodCenter of Wisconsin, part of Versiti, is among four academic and research centers which will receive approximately $28 million during the next five years from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), to launch a new national Career Development in Glycosciences program.

The program will receive approximately $5.5 million for its own Program for Career Development in Glycosciences. The consortium includes:

• BloodCenter of Wisconsin Program for Career Development in Glycosciences (BloodCenter of Wisconsin, Medical College of Wisconsin, Virginia Commonwealth University and Roswell Park Cancer Institute)
• UC-San Diego Program for Career Development in Glycosciences
• Hopkins-Cleveland Clinic Program for Career Development in Glycosciences (Johns Hopkins University, Cleveland Clinic)
• Harvard Program for Career Development in Glycosciences (Harvard University)

Mounting evidence suggests glycans play an important role in human development, health and disease, and should be taken into account when new therapeutics are designed and tested.

All life forms on earth carry four basic building blocks: DNA, RNA, proteins, lipids (including fats) and glycans (simple and complex carbohydrates). While almost everyone has heard of DNA and RNA, people typically associate fats and carbohydrates with unhealthy food and obesity. But life requires that all four components work together in various combinations.

“Translational medicine fosters cross-functional collaborations among researchers and clinicians to facilitate precision-driven treatments for individualized therapy,” said Ken Hoffman, M.D., Senior Investigator, BloodCenter of Wisconsin Blood Research Institute. “Scientists and clinicians successfully applied this approach to DNA and proteins, however the science of glycans (carbohydrates) has received little attention. Hence, glycocience and translational aspects of glycosciences lag far behind other disciplines.”

Dr. Hoffman is also the Director of the Translational Glycomics Center at BloodCenter of Wisconsin’s Blood Research Institute, and Professor of Biochemistry, Medical College of Wisconsin. She will lead the cross-disciplinary Career Development in Glycosciences program at BloodCenter of Wisconsin, with Nancy Dahms, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Oncology and Distinguished Member of the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology, Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

The BloodCenter of Wisconsin program will recruit and train more than 12 early career glycoscientists during the next five years, with a focus on recruiting clinical scientists. Program applicants must be graduates with M.D., Ph.D. or M.D./Ph.D. degrees able to commit to a rigorous coursework in glycosciences while completing research with a program mentor — one of 23 established faculty members across four institutions studying various biological, chemical and biomedical aspects of glycans.

Trainees also will have access to leading-edge glycan research technologies at each of the participating institutions — BloodCenter of Wisconsin, Virginia Commonwealth University, Medical College of Wisconsin, Roswell Park Cancer Institute — and opportunities to rotate in collaborating laboratories, network with visiting scholars and participate in local, national and international symposiums.

With its newly established Translational Glycomics Center at the Blood Research Institute and the three participating institutions, BloodCenter of Wisconsin bridges new and established expertise in glycosciences to the near consortium. The center’s leadership and faculty already have played key roles in national glycosciences advances. Dr. Hoffman works with institutions such as the American Society of Hematology, International Society of Thrombosis and Hemostasis, and others, to bring glycosciences into the mainstream.

The Blood Research Institute is establishing coursework locally and cross-institutionally, establishing facilities that support academic and industrial research, as well as organizing annual symposiums to share new advances in the field.

The Power Of One | How You Can Get Involved

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Your financial support can make one transfusion possible and/or help keep a lab open for operation for a year. Every donation is a powerful step toward eradicating blood disease as we know it.

Use your power today!

Did you know the dictionary defines research as organized study? In other words, a methodological investigation into a subject in order to discover facts, to establish or revise a theory; to develop a plan of action based on the facts discovered.

At Versiti, we define research as “that which gives hope, brings promise, and enhances both current and future-saving techniques.”

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BRI Welcomes New Cell Therapy Researcher

The BRI welcomed John A. Pulikkan, PhD, to its research team on October 8th. He joined us from the University of Massachusetts Medical School where he conducted his post-doctoral training. He will focus his research on understanding the basic mechanisms governing chromatin dynamics during hematopoiesis and how this is disrupted in leukemia.

John joined the BRI as an associate investigator and said the BRI offers him a chance to conduct cutting edge research in leukemia, grow his career, and help others grow theirs. “I am thrilled to join (the) BRI because it will enable me to test more challenging questions in depth right now. I hope my studies will help in the design of better therapeutic methods in the treatment of various cancers including leukemia,” he said.

He studies how mutations in the DNA of blood cells direct leukemia formation. Recently, he worked in the development of a novel molecule that inhibits the expansion of acute myeloid leukemia cells with mutations in the core binding factor (CBF) beta gene. By using novel approaches his research showed proof-of-principle that protein-protein interactions and oncogenic transcription factors, so-called ‘undraggable’ targets in cancer therapy, can be targeted effectively by small molecule inhibitors. As an independent investigator he plans to uncover mechanisms underlying gene regulation by chromatin in hematopoiesis and leukemia, and therapeutic aspects of targeting chromatin dysregulation in leukemia.

In 2012, he received Scholar Award from American Society of Hematology (ASH). John was one of seven basic research fellows from across the country to receive the award. In 2014, he received the Young Investigator Award from Alex’s Lemonade Foundation and Discovery grant from Lauri Strauss Leukemia Foundation. In 2014, he received the Young Investigator Award from American Society of Hematology (ASH). John was one of seven basic research fellows from across the country to receive the award. In 2014, he received the Young Investigator Award from Alex’s Lemonade Foundation and Discovery grant from Lauri Strauss Leukemia Foundation.

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