Northwestern Mutual Announces New Childhood Cancer Research Grants, Marks Milestone by Providing More Than $1.2 Million

Company funds eight researchers through Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation's Young Investigator program

MILWAUKEE, Oct. 1, 2015 /PRNewswire/ -- Today Northwestern Mutual announced through its Foundation the funding of four new grant awards for childhood cancer research. The awards support Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation's (ALSF) Young Investigator program which is designed to support scientists in the early stages of their careers as they pursue promising research ideas.

Less than five percent of the federal government's total funding for cancer research supports childhood cancer research. Since 2012, Northwestern Mutual has committed more than $1.2 million to ALSF's Young Investigators program.

Each Young Investigator grant recipient will be awarded$100,000 over two years. With the addition of these four new research awards, Northwestern Mutual currently funds a total of eight projects – an $800,000 commitment. The other four recipients were granted their initial funding last year.

"There remains much work to be done when it comes to treatments and therapies for childhood cancer, and we're proud to support researchers as they develop these invaluable tools and approaches," said John Kordsmeier, president of the Northwestern Mutual Foundation. "By researching treatments and cures, we're giving children and families help when they need it the most."

The four new Young Investigator grant recipients include:

Challice Bonifant, M.D./Ph.D., University of Michigan: Dr. Bonifant is researching immunotherapies for pediatric acute myeloid leukemia (AML), a type of high-risk blood cancer. Her work with modified T cells (immune cells) has shown promise in early clinical research against acute lymphoblastic leukemia, and this grant will allow for further testing against AML.
Abhinav Dey, Ph.D., Emory University: Dr. Dey's research explores how molecules that regulate normal brain development can be hijacked by tumor cells and enabled to survive radiation. His studies will lead to insights as to how doctors can reduce radiation levels used to treat children with medulloblastoma, the most common solid malignant pediatric tumor, by altering the activity of cancer-associated proteins.
Elliot Stieglitz, M.D., University of California, San Francisco: Dr. Stieglitz's research focuses on juvenile myelomonocytic leukemia, a difficult-to-treat pediatric blood cancer. Dr. Stieglitz has found mutations in the DNA of more than 100 children that likely explain why doctors are unable to rid some of their disease. By understanding how these DNA mutations allow the leukemia to become so aggressive, he hopes to offer smarter and better-tolerated treatments.
Robyn Sussman, Ph.D., The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: Dr. Sussman's research on neuroblastoma focuses on a particular genetic mutation that often enables this type of cancer to develop in children. Her work will study this cell target to understand its presence, role and how to best design a therapy to kill these cells.

ALSF grants follow a competitive review process and decisions are based upon scientific merit, potential to advance cures and treatments and the investigator's dedication to childhood cancer research.

This year will mark the third ALSF Young Investigator Summit, presented by Northwestern Mutual. The two-day summit, taking place October 19-21, 2015, in Philadelphia, will bring together 50 researchers from across the country to collaborate, build new relationships and interact with leading researchers in the pediatric oncology field.

Through these summits, the Young Investigator grants and a variety of other initiatives, Northwestern Mutual and its financial representatives and employees have contributed more than $8 million for the cause, funding more than 65,000 hours of research to help discover life-saving treatments for kids. Northwestern Mutual is also committed to helping ease the financial and emotional impacts of childhood cancer on families and children, including financial support for families who need to travel for treatments at select medical institutions across the U.S.

About Northwestern Mutual

Northwestern Mutual has been helping families and businesses achieve financial security for nearly 160 years. Our financial representatives build relationships with clients through a distinctive planning approach that integrates risk management with wealth accumulation, preservation and distribution. With more than $230 billion in assets, $27 billion in revenues and more than $1.5 trillion worth of life insurance protection in force, Northwestern Mutual delivers financial security to more than 4.2 million people who rely on us for insurance and investment solutions, including life, disability and long-term care insurance; annuities; trust services; mutual funds; and investment advisory products and services.

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About Northwestern Mutual Foundation

The mission of the Northwestern Mutual Foundation is to improve the lives of children and families in need. The Foundation has given more than $290 million since its inception in 1992 and is designed to create lasting impact in the communities where the company's employees and financial representatives live and work. We accomplish this by combining financial support, volunteerism, thought leadership and convening community partners to deliver the best outcomes. Our efforts are focused nationally on curing childhood cancer, and locally on education, neighborhoods and making our hometown of Milwaukee a great destination.

About Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation

Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation (ALSF) emerged from the front yard lemonade stand of cancer patient Alexandra "Alex" Scott (1996-2004). In 2000, 4-year-old Alex announced that she wanted to hold a lemonade stand to raise money to help find a cure for all children with cancer. Since Alex held that first stand, the Foundation bearing her name has evolved into a national fundraising movement, complete with thousands of supporters across the country carrying on her legacy of hope. To date, Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, a registered 501(c)3 charity, has raised more than $100 million toward fulfilling Alex's dream of finding a cure, funding over 500 pediatric cancer research projects nationally. For more information on Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, visit AlexsLemonade.org.

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