Childhood Cancer Research at Risk of Losing Key Talent, According to New Survey by Northwestern Mutual

Researchers' promising projects, passion to find cures met with harsh reality of lack of funds

MILWAUKEE, Oct. 24, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of childhood cancer researchers say a passion to find a cure for childhood cancer is the top reason why they chose to work in the field, according to a new survey by Northwestern Mutual, and many (41 percent) of those who want to stay in the field plan to do so because their research is at a promising point.

(Photo: http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20131024/AQ03236-INFO-a)

(Photo: http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20131024/AQ03236-INFO-b)

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Only 18 percent of respondents feel that significant progress has been made in the last five years in developing better treatments and finding cures for childhood cancer, yet that isn't stopping them from pursuing their passion to find cures for kids.

Four in 10 (39 percent) like the challenge of working on a rare disease and half (51 percent) would like to spend more time to finding cures for childhood cancer than they currently do.

However, the same survey reveals what is stopping them: nine in 10 (91 percent) say lack of funding is a top obstacle in pursuing their passion to save kids from the deadly disease. Additionally, most researchers (79 percent) are concerned that future advancements in finding better treatments and cures for childhood cancer will suffer due to lack of new researchers going into the field.

As part of its philanthropic commitment to supporting the search for treatments and cures, Northwestern Mutual commissioned a national survey of childhood cancer researchers to probe the barriers in research of the disease and rally support for funds.

"Childhood cancer research is a field filled with hope, passion and the promise of life-saving treatments and cures. There are research projects underway that have the potential to help children," said John Kordsmeier, president of the Northwestern Mutual Foundation. "But low funding for childhood cancer research doesn't come close to matching researchers' relentless passion," he continued. "This is why Northwestern Mutual is committed to increasing research funds to find cures, so we can give kids and families the gift of time together."

The survey was announced today at the Young Investigator Summit at Texas Children's Hospital inHouston. The Summit was sponsored by Northwestern Mutual in support of Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation (ALSF), a nonprofit dedicated to finding better treatments and ultimately cures for all kids with cancer as well as supporting childhood cancer young investigators, or new scientists at the end of their fellowship training, at the early stages of their research careers.

The event gathered nearly 30 ALSF Young Investigator Grant recipients to foster collaboration to advance scientific research for the next generation of childhood cancer researchers.

Cancer is the leading cause of death by disease in children under the age of 15 in the U.S., yet research is vastly underfunded as compared to other cancers, causing a decrease in time spent finding treatments and cures for kids.

Unfortunately, childhood cancer researchers are considering leaving the field and researchers are concerned their colleagues are not pursuing childhood cancer research due to lack of funding:

One in five (21 percent) respondents would consider leaving the field of childhood cancer research. Of those who may be considering leaving the field, the number one reason is lack of funding (80 percent).
More than one third (34 percent) of respondents know colleagues who are considering leaving the field in the next two years. Of those who know of researchers considering leaving the field, the top reason again is lack of funding (90 percent).
Overall, nine in 10 (90 percent) are concerned that researchers are not pursuing research in childhood cancer due to lack of funding.
Seven in 10 (71 percent) know of specific researchers whose projects are in danger of not getting additional funding.

"This is an exciting yet daunting time in the field of childhood cancer research. New technologies and therapies on the horizon have the potential to transform the lives of children battling cancer," said Todd Druley, MD, PhD, and assistant professor of pediatrics and genetics at Washington University in St. Louis, Mo. who attended the Young Investigator Summit. . "But this progress is in great danger. We're at risk of losing a whole generation of childhood cancer researchers, as shown by these survey results," he continued. "If talented, young childhood cancer researchers begin to seek careers elsewhere, the promise of curing more kids with cancer is in great jeopardy."

To learn more about the Childhood Cancer Program, please visit www.nmfoundation.com.

About the Northwestern Mutual Foundation
The mission of the Northwestern Mutual Foundation – the largest corporate foundation in the state of Wisconsin – is to build strong, vibrant communities that serve as a legacy to future generations. The Foundation's giving is designed to create an impact on the communities where the company's employees and financial representatives live and work.

About Northwestern Mutual
Northwestern Mutual is among the "World's Most Admired" life insurance companies in 2013 according to FORTUNE® magazine and has helped clients achieve financial security for more than 156 years. As a mutual company with $1.4 trillion of life insurance protection in force, Northwestern Mutual has no shareholders. The company focuses solely and directly on its clients and seeks to deliver consistent and dependable value to them over time.

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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 $65 million toward fulfilling Alex's dream of finding a cure, funding over 350 pediatric cancer research projects nationally. For more information on Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, visit AlexsLemonade.org.

About the Research
These are some of the findings of an online survey conducted July 25 – August 8, 2013 conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs among 182 individuals in the field of childhood cancer research. While interviews were conducted online, respondents were recruited both via email and postal mail. To qualify, respondents were screened to ensure that they spent at least 1% of their research time on finding better cures or treatments for childhood cancer. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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