



Washington Research

F O U N D A T I O N

Washington Research Foundation Provides Additional \$1.5M Grant for Dr. Jim Olson's Novel Immunotherapy Program at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

Funding will progress lead candidates in Olson's Simultaneous Multiple Interaction T-Cell Engagers (SMITEs) project targeting difficult-to-treat cancers

Seattle, WA—September 19, 2019

Washington Research Foundation (WRF) has pledged over \$1.5 million in additional support for a novel immunotherapy platform being developed in Dr. Jim Olson's lab at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (Fred Hutch).

The Olson lab's Simultaneous Multiple Interaction T-Cell Engagers (SMITEs) technology offers a new approach for harnessing the patient's immune system to more specifically target cancerous cells. Possible benefits may include increased survival rates for cancer patients while avoiding many of the side effects of currently available treatments. The SMITEs platform is designed to potentially enable this goal by simultaneously administering two molecules that aid the immune system in responding to cancer cells expressing two targeted antigens, while ignoring healthy cells expressing one or none.

Although bispecific T-cell engagers (BiTEs) are already used to treat leukemias, Fred Hutch researchers hope that the added specificity of the SMITEs platform will provide effective treatment of patients with solid tumors. This would provide a breakthrough for the majority of cancer patients whose immunotherapy options are currently limited.

"The success of many forms of immunotherapy depends on a target that truly distinguishes cancer from normal tissue—and there are very few of those. We acknowledge this inconvenient truth and developed a platform of 'smart molecules' that distinguish cancer from normal tissue using more than one cancer target," said Olson.

WRF previously supported the SMITEs project with a technology-development grant of \$400,000. Additional funding of \$2.3 million has come from outside sources including the National Institutes of Health, Children's Oncology Group Foundation and the Harry W. Bass, Jr. Foundation.

Beth Etscheid, Ph.D., director of grant programs at WRF, said, "Jim Olson and Fred Hutch are carrying out exactly the type of work where we think our grants can have the most impact—those that focus on bold solutions to major problems, especially in the life sciences. Jim and his team are determined to improve cancer treatments and have made impressive progress in each phase of this project. It's ambitious, but Jim is a proven innovator."

WRF's new funding will help Olson develop the SMITEs platform by initially enabling the construction and non-clinical testing of BiTE pairs.

"The WRF partnership has enabled our team to build a pipeline of immunotherapy candidates. WRF understands that the best way to help cancer patients is to develop therapeutic candidates that require a commercialization process," said Olson.

WRF managing director Will Canestaro, Ph.D., said, "We are excited for this technology's potential to improve the outcomes of cancer patients. Additionally, as a foundation focused on commercialization, we believe this team's work has the potential to create another high-growth biotech company here in Seattle."

About Washington Research Foundation:

Washington Research Foundation (WRF) supports research and scholarship in Washington state, with a focus on life sciences and enabling technologies.

WRF was formed in 1981 to assist universities and other nonprofit research institutions in Washington state with the commercialization and licensing of their technologies. WRF is recognized as one of the foremost technology transfer and grant-making organizations in the nation, having earned more than \$444 million in licensing revenue for the University of Washington and providing over \$98 million in grants to the state's research institutions to date.

For additional information, please visit www.wrfseattle.org.

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