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Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Make an Appointment
Back
In the News
Refer a Patient
Cancer & Treatment

ABOUT US

Our mission, vision & core values
Leadership
History
Equality, diversity & inclusion
Annual report
Give to MSK

behalf of its founder Daniel K. Ludwig, with Memorial Sloan Kettering's funding going to support research that builds on its groundbreaking work in the field of cancer immunotherapy. Announced today, the gift is among the largest publicly recorded gifts to cancer research made by a private organization. It adds to an endowment established in 2006 to support research efforts at each institution, bringing the total endowment to $900 million.

The Ludwig Center for Cancer Immunotherapy at Memorial Sloan Kettering received $90 million through this latest gift. The support will help expand and accelerate research to develop novel therapies that act by stimulating or strengthening the immune system's inherent ability to fight cancer — an approach that has shown great promise in the treatment of several cancer types.

"This extraordinary gift will enable us to engage in high-risk, high-impact, cutting-edge research at the intersection of immunology, cancer biology, and clinical oncology," says Alexander Rudensky, Chair of the Immunology Program in the Sloan Kettering Institute and Director of the Ludwig Center for Cancer Immunotherapy. "It will also help attract the best and the brightest new researchers and clinicians to the field of tumor immunology and accelerate our ability to translate basic findings around the mechanisms governing the immune system into revolutionary immunotherapies for patients with cancer."

Measurable Progress in Ludwig-Sponsored Research

Ludwig's initial gift in 2006 allowed Memorial Sloan Kettering to establish a state-of-the-art collaborative immunotherapy research center. Staffed by some of the world's leading experts in the field, the Ludwig Center for Cancer Immunotherapy is streamlining the translation of basic-science discoveries toward the care of patients with cancer.

Research conducted by the center's investigators has generated several experimental treatments that have progressed to pivotal phase III trials. One trial contributed to the development of ipilimumab (Yervoy™), an innovative cancer therapy that works by manipulating a patient's immune system and the first drug shown to help patients with advanced melanoma live longer. Another resulted in the licensure of ONCEPT™ — the first and only therapeutic vaccine approved by the US Department of Agriculture for the treatment of canine melanoma — which has been shown to extend the survival of dogs with advanced stages of the disease.

More recently, Ludwig Cancer Research has supported a state-of-the-art Immune Monitoring Core Facility, which allows researchers to measure the impact of new immunologic therapies in patients enrolled in clinical trials at Memorial Sloan Kettering, as well as at collaborating sites all over the world.

"The increased support will not only allow us to expand our Immune Monitoring Facility, but will also permit us to catalyze the field by providing funding for novel clinical trials that seek to clinically exploit the most important scientific discoveries in the area of cancer immunology," explains Jedd Wolchok, who serves as Associate Director of the Ludwig Center for Cancer Immunotherapy.

Researchers at the Ludwig Collaborative Laboratory at Memorial Sloan Kettering, which is led by Dr. Wolchok, work closely with the Ludwig Center for

Cancer Immunotherapy to study the mechanisms underlying immune suppression and develop new therapies to overcome barriers to tumor immunity. They are exploring these novel therapies alone and in combination with other treatment methods such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and targeted therapies. They are also investigating ways to improve vaccine strategies to deliver antitumor immunity.

“The extraordinarily generous gift from Ludwig Cancer Research will have a transformative impact on our work by helping us to continue our quest to find the most potent and precise ways to use the patient’s own immune system as a means of durably controlling a broad spectrum of cancers,” says Dr. Wolchok, who is leading clinical research into the use of ipilimumab and other immunotherapies.

Back to top

A Lifeline for Biomedical Research

The most recent Ludwig gift was made on behalf of Daniel K. Ludwig, a late American businessman who began to support cancer research in 1971 with the establishment of the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, a global research organization that includes 600 scientists around the world. The gift recognizes a long and distinguished history at Memorial Sloan Kettering in the field of tumor immunology. The late immunologist Lloyd J. Old, who served as Associate Director of Research at Memorial Sloan Kettering, headed the Ludwig Institute for 17 years and is widely regarded as a pioneer in the field of tumor immunology.

During his more than 50-year-long career at Memorial Sloan Kettering, Dr. Old made seminal contributions to our understanding of the immune system and how it is able to detect and kill cancer cells. Among his discoveries were cell-surface markers, which enable the immune system to identify cancer cells, and helper and killer T cells, which allow the immune system to destroy infectious agents as well as tumor cells.

Today, the scientific efforts endowed through Mr. Ludwig’s resources have grown to encompass the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research as well as six Ludwig Centers across the United States, located at Memorial Sloan Kettering, Johns Hopkins University, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, and University of Chicago. Collectively referred to as Ludwig Cancer Research, the Institute and Centers are engaged in the pursuit of breakthroughs to alter the course of cancer. Mr. Ludwig’s total commitment to advancing cancer research now reaches $2.5 billion.

“In this worrisome climate of uncertain federal research support, renewable sources of funding that provide flexibility and freedom to take on risky, ambitious projects are vital to sustain biomedical research enterprise in this country,” notes Dr. Rudensky. “Philanthropic organizations like Ludwig Cancer Research that take the lead in supporting pioneering, groundbreaking research are truly a lifeline, and have a tremendous impact for basic and translational research efforts that bring about novel means of treatment for a variety of diseases, including cancer.”

Back to top

PREVIOUS
In the News

NEXT
Memorial Sloan Kettering Researchers Appointed to Stand Up To Cancer Immunology “Dream Team”

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Price transparency
Public notices

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