

## **PRESS RELEASE**

# JOHN HANSEN RESEARCH GRANT 2020

### **DKMS STIFTUNG LEBEN SPENDEN (FOUNDATION FOR GIVING LIFE) SUPPORTS YOUNG SCIENTISTS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST BLOOD CANCER**

**Tübingen, Germany, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 – The DKMS Foundation for Giving Life provides a total of almost €1 million (more than \$1 million) of funding to support international blood cancer research. Four young scientists – two from the US, one from Switzerland and one from the Netherlands – will each receive a John Hansen Research Grant worth €240,000 (\$270,000). The funding will support promising research projects in the field of hematological malignancies cell therapy that aim to improve blood cancer patients' chances of survival and cure. Two of the four projects involve CAR-T cells.**

Four young scientists from three countries will be awarded the John Hansen Research Grant, the research scholarship of the DKMS Foundation for Giving Life. Each winner will receive €240,000 (\$270,000) over a period of three years. “All four winners have outstanding expertise,” says a delighted Marcel van den Brink, Chairman of the DKMS Foundation for Giving Life. “Their innovative and progressive research approaches are important contributions to blood cancer research and for patients around the world. We think it’s important to support them. It’s a matter very close to our hearts.”

This year, as last, all four award-winners are women. Dr. Cynthia Perez of the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois (CHUV) in Lausanne (“Exploiting SLAMF7 self-interactions to provide additional co-stimulation to CAR-T cells against multiple myeloma”) and Dr. Andrea Schmidts of the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center in Charlestown (“CRISPR-based Modeling of Genetic Resistance to CAR-T Cell Therapy for Multiple Myeloma”) both focus on the same current challenge in multiple myeloma therapy: the lack of an effective and sustained immune response to CAR-T cells. In recent years, CAR-T cell therapy has delivered astonishing results in the treatment of other blood cancer types, but it is not fully effective against multiple myeloma. Dr. Perez is examining the potential of the protein SLAMF7. Dr. Schmidts uses novel CRISPR gene editing tools to model the development of resistance mechanisms to CAR-T cell therapy.

The underlying mechanisms of Graft-versus-Host Disease (GVHD), one of the most frequent complications after hematopoietic stem cell transplantation, and Graft-versus-Tumor, are the focus of the work by Dr. Yiouli Ktena (“Defining the role and targets of T cell DNA methylation in control of graft-versus-host disease and the graft-versus-tumor effect after allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation”). Dr. Ktena is investigating how DNA methylation regulates the immune cells.

Dr. Mirjam Belderbos (“What is the optimal stem cell source for transplantation? Population dynamics of post-transplant hematopoiesis using single cell analysis of somatic mutations”), who works at the Princess Máxima Center for Pediatric Oncology in Utrecht, is investigating the effects of the stem cell source on stem cells transplanted into patients, and whether hematopoietic stem cells from a family member, an unrelated adult donor, or a cord blood donor influence the type and frequency of mutations in blood cells.

### **Save the Date: New call begins on 1 August!**

From 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020, upcoming scientists from around the world are once again invited to submit their application for a John Hansen Research Grant for their research project. For more information on the eligibility criteria, deadlines and application procedure for the John Hansen Research Grant 2020, please visit [www.dkms.org/john-hansen-grant](http://www.dkms.org/john-hansen-grant) or send an email to [grant@dkms.org](mailto:grant@dkms.org).

### **DKMS – Active in medicine and science**

DKMS is well-known as the world’s largest stem cell donor registry. But what many people don’t know is that the organisation has its own highly qualified research team, as well as a high-tech lab in Dresden, and a range of research programs performing medical-scientific work that will give more people with blood cancer a second chance at life. “Registering stem cell donors isn’t enough,” says Marcel van den Brink, Chairman of the DKMS Foundation for Giving Life. “Driving medical progress in this field is just as important.” Support for upcoming researchers has a key role to play in this regard. The John Hansen Research Grant (known until 2019 as the Mechtild Harf Research Grant) has been awarded every year since 2015 to as many as four talented young scientists. To qualify for consideration, applicants must have earned their PhD, M.D, or equivalent, within the last twelve years. Their research project should focus on cell therapy and aim to support and advance the fight against blood cancer sustainably and effectively.

### **John A. Hansen – Pioneer and multiple lifesaver**

The DKMS Stiftung Leben Spenden named its scholarships after John A. Hansen, a preeminent oncologist and leader in the field of immunogenetics at the renowned Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle – and a kind-hearted and empathic medical specialist. His outstanding achievements in the field of hematopoietic stem cell transplantation have helped to significantly increase the efficacy and safety of blood stem cell and bone marrow transplants, giving numerous patients a new chance at life. He had close ties with the DKMS family, being a long-standing member of the DKMS Foundation Board and of the DKMS Medical Council. After his death at the age of 76 on 31 July 2019, the Mechtild Harf Research Grant was renamed in his honor.

**About DKMS**

DKMS is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to the fight against blood cancer. Our mission is to give as many patients as possible a second chance at life. We are a world leader in the provision of stem cells for life-saving transplantations. DKMS is active not only in Germany but also in the US, Poland, UK and Chile and together with BMST Foundation in India, with a combined total of more than 10 million donors in our registry. We also carry out scientific research, setting standards in the typing of new stem cell donors in our DKMS Life Science Lab.

**About the DKMS Stiftung Leben Spenden (Foundation for Giving Life)**

The DKMS Stiftung Leben Spenden is the parent organization of DKMS and focuses, among other things, on advancing research projects in the field of stem cell removal and transplantation. The John Hansen Research Grant, in honor of John Hansen, provides funding support to promising and developing researchers to advance the understanding of complications and therapeutic strategies in the context of hematopoietic cell transplantation and cellular therapies for hematologic malignancies. The grant is funded by the DKMS Stiftung Leben Spenden and administered by DKMS gGmbH.

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