



Ninety-six Cummings Point Road Stamford, CT 06902 [www.acgtfoundation.org](http://www.acgtfoundation.org)

June 9, 2005

For Immediate Release to: *Associated Press*  
Contact: Allison Neslage at ACGT - 203.358.8000 or [aneslage@acgtfoundation.org](mailto:aneslage@acgtfoundation.org).

**ACGT Awards Four Grants for Innovative Research**  
**Grants to Prestigious Institutions Investigating Cancer Gene Therapy**

The Alliance for Cancer Gene Therapy, Inc. [ACGT] a public charity committed to funding innovative research, has awarded four *Young Investigator* grants to prestigious research institutions conducting innovative research into gene therapy for cancer. Gene therapy was born thirty years ago; however the technology to realize that potential is only now available, opening the door to dramatically new possibilities in the treatment of cancers of all kinds. The long-term goal of cancer gene therapy is the development of discriminating medicines and drugs that attack only cancer cells, thereby eliminating adverse affects to the body. Gene therapy may someday soon make cancer a manageable disease.

According to Edward Netter, President of ACGT, "All cancer is in the genes; therefore gene therapy seeks treatment directed specifically to the genes that have been compromised, in the hopes of targeting the cancer and eliminating adverse effects to other parts of the body."

ACGT, established in 2001, is the only private organization in the nation committed exclusively to the funding of cancer gene therapy research. The organization was founded on the knowledge that genes play a powerful role in the development of cancer, thus there is enormous potential for gene cell therapies for all forms of cancer. "These were not random or serendipitous beliefs," said Netter, "rather the realization that \$14 billion is spent annually in this country on cancer research, and another \$64 billion on cancer care, with disappointing results. We believe that significant research outcomes are most likely to occur within the framework of a business model that encourages stringent scientific standards and innovation. It is our goal to provide the funding to move the science to new levels." In the foundation's first three years, \$7.7 million has been awarded to fourteen research projects on leukemia, lymphoma and neuroblastoma [a deadly childhood cancer] as well as breast, lung, ovarian and prostate cancers, and alternatives to optomize treatment.

In total, four *Young Investigator* awards were granted this year to:

*Mukesh K. Jain*, Assistant Professor at Harvard Medical School and Director of the Cardiovascular Transcriptional Biology Program at Brigham and Women's Hospital. The award will fund a three-year research project into an alternative treatment for cancer known as anti-angiogenesis. "Angiogenesis, the growth of new blood vessels, is critical for the development and progression of cancerous tumors," said Dr. Jain. "The identification of mechanisms to retard new blood vessel formation is likely to provide a novel approach to treat cancer. This particular research study will test the use of a special polymer compound to deliver genes to the tumor site."

*Chien-fu Hung*, Assistant Professor at Johns Hopkins University. The award will fund a three-year research project into alternative treatment for ovarian cancer. Ovarian cancer accounts for approximately 25% of gynecological cancers in women, but over 50% of deaths. Current treatments rarely result in long-term cure. Says Dr. Hung, "This study will focus on an approach taken by gene therapy known as immunotherapy. Cancer cells are not recognized by the body's immune system because they are not foreign, rather mutations of existing cells. The intent of immunotherapy is to induce the individual's immune system to recognize cancer cells as if they are foreign, and thus a threat, so that these cells are destroyed."

*Jian Yu*, Assistant Professor at University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine. The award will fund a three-year research project into alternative treatment for lung cancer. "Lung cancer remains one of the

greatest public health threats, despite advancement in the understanding of molecular genetics,” said Dr. Yu. “We have been accumulating preliminary data and developing reagents for this project for the past two years, and we are encouraged by the early results. With this funding, we will be able to expand the research into animal model trials, and it is our hope that these efforts will allow us to examine the feasibility of moving PUMA gene therapy towards clinical trials.”

*Suzie Pun*, Assistant Professor at the University of Washington. The award will fund a three-year research project into treatment of tumors using a targeted non-viral mode of delivery. “Tumors exist as dense masses in the body,” said Dr. Pun. “The physical structure of these solid tumors present a formidable challenge to drug delivery vehicles that need to penetrate and reach all cancer cells in order to be optimally effective. The goal of this research is to develop synthetic nanoparticles that efficiently penetrate solid tumors. I am convinced that the efficacy of gene therapy can be substantially improved by designing delivery vehicles that overcome the physical barriers.”

ACGT also grants a *Senior Investigator Award* of up to one million dollars to more established researchers conducting groundbreaking research approaching clinical translation within three to five years.

ACGT is committed to promoting the best possible research by creating a powerful alliance between philanthropic individuals, research organizations, and business and community groups, in order to stimulate results in this important field. A separate fund secures administrative costs, so that 100% of donor funding goes directly to research. “We believe that gene therapy is the future,” says Mr. Netter, “and the future is now.”

**For further information** on ACGT, go to [www.acgtfoundation.org](http://www.acgtfoundation.org) or contact Allison Neslage at 203.358.8000 or [aneslage@acgtfoundation.org](mailto:aneslage@acgtfoundation.org).