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The Lustgarten Foundation and Salk Institute announce strategic pancreatic cancer research partnership

Cooperative and innovative approach to provide critical insight into pancreatic cancer biology and the development of potent novel therapeutics

LA JOLLA/NEW YORK— (February 14, 2022) The Lustgarten Foundation and Salk Institute today announced a new strategic partnership supported by a \$5 million grant and focused on identifying and validating potential targets for new pancreatic cancer drugs. The effort will be led by four co-principal investigators, prominent cancer researchers in the Salk Dedicated Program in Pancreatic Cancer: Professors Reuben Shaw, Ronald Evans, Tony Hunter and Dannielle Engle. The partnership is part of the Lustgarten Advancing Breakthrough Science (LABS) Program.

“Through collaboration at the research level and between organizations, this strategic and forward-looking support from the Lustgarten Foundation will allow our team of talented scientists to explore potential drug targets for a disease with few treatment options,” says Salk President [Rusty Gage](#).

The Lustgarten Foundation is the world’s largest private funder of pancreatic cancer research and is focused on improving patient outcomes and serving as a catalyst in the field of pancreatic cancer research. Lustgarten-funded research has been a driving force in every major advancement in pancreatic cancer research since 1998.

“The Foundation’s funding of the Salk Dedicated Program in Pancreatic Cancer is unique because we’re committed to funding preeminent pancreatic cancer scientists focused on a single goal,” says David Tuveson, MD/PhD, Lustgarten Foundation chief scientist, American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) president and director of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Cancer Center. “Unlike most funding models, Lustgarten LABS gives scientists at leading research institutions the freedom to build the right team and infrastructure to support the kind of high-risk, high-reward studies required to meet the goal.”

Shaw, lead investigator on the grant and director of Salk’s National Cancer Institute-Designated Cancer Center, adds, “We are honored to be the first Lustgarten LAB on the West Coast, which really catalyzes the four participating labs to share common equipment and resources as we bring our individual areas of complementary expertise to bear on the collaborative goal of curing pancreatic cancer.”

In addition to the new collaboration with the Salk, the LABS Program includes existing collaborations with Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (NY); Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (MA); MIT (MA); and two labs at Johns Hopkins (MD). Scientists at each of the LABS frequently collaborate, sharing new capabilities and specialized information to further the pancreatic cancer research field and to advance the most promising discoveries in the lab to treat patients in the clinic.

Pancreatic cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. and has the highest mortality rate of all cancers, with a five-year survival rate of 10.8%. [According to the National Institutes of Health](#), in 2021 an estimated 60,430 Americans were diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in the U.S. and more than 48,220 were expected to die from the disease. The partnership between Salk and the Lustgarten Foundation intends to change those odds.

The Salk Institute is pursuing funding that will match the Lustgarten grant of \$1 million per year over the next five years.

The Salk researchers are exploring unique and understudied areas related to diagnosing and treating pancreatic cancer: Reuben Shaw, professor in the Molecular and Cell Biology Laboratory and William R. Brody Chair, explores the role of lipid metabolism. Ronald Evans, professor in the Gene Expression Laboratory and March of Dimes Chair in Molecular and Development Biology, investigates transcriptional and epigenetic targets. Tony Hunter, American Cancer Society Professor in the Molecular and Cell Biology Laboratory and Renato Dulbecco Chair, will continue his

renowned exploration of kinase drug targets. Dannielle Engle, assistant professor in the Regulatory Biology Laboratory, addresses vulnerabilities in glycans, carbohydrates that coat proteins and cells. Michael Downes, senior staff scientist in the Gene Expression Laboratory, will oversee the central core facility studying changes in pancreatic cancer, and developing new models and therapeutic approaches.

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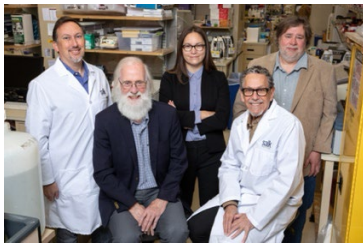
About the Salk Institute for Biological Studies:

Every cure has a starting point. The Salk Institute embodies Jonas Salk's mission to dare to make dreams into reality. Its internationally renowned and award-winning scientists explore the very foundations of life, seeking new understandings in neuroscience, genetics, immunology, plant biology and more. The Institute is an independent nonprofit organization and architectural landmark: small by choice, intimate by nature and fearless in the face of any challenge. Be it cancer or Alzheimer's, aging or diabetes, Salk is where cures begin. Learn more at: salk.edu.

About the Lustgarten Foundation

The Lustgarten Foundation is the largest private funder of pancreatic cancer in the world, funding preeminent pancreatic cancer researchers, driving the pursuit of bold and innovative science toward earlier detection, better treatments and transforming pancreatic cancer into a curable disease. The Foundation funds research where creative risks yield high rewards to accelerate and expand life-saving treatment options. We believe time is everything to patients and their families, and that community is power. Lustgarten programs and events provide people affected by pancreatic cancer a voice and a place to create hope, together. 100% of all donations fuel the research to advance understanding of this complex, devastating and historically underfunded cancer. For more information, visit www.lustgarten.org.

Images:



Caption: Top from left: Reuben Shaw, Dannielle Engle and Michael Downes
Bottom from left: Tony Hunter and Ronald Evans
Credit: Salk Institute