

October 17, 2017 | By Erika Johnson

## **Strauss Family Gives UC San Diego \$1 Million to Help Develop a Cancer Vaccine**

Iris and Matthew Strauss hold a great deal of respect for the doctors at Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health. When their daughter's cancer reappeared, it was the first place they turned for help. Because of their experience and trust in the medical and research staff, the couple recently donated \$1 million to the University of California San Diego to support a clinical trial over the next year designed to develop personalized cancer vaccines—a breakthrough treatment that could help patients like their daughter fight the disease using their own immune system.

“Moores Cancer Center is one of the finest institutions anywhere; their expertise is unparalleled,” said Matthew Strauss. “This vaccine is something new that uses a patient’s own cells. We want to help launch this new breakthrough in medicine and support the greater good.”

The Strauss family has supported many initiatives across the UC San Diego campus for nearly three decades. Iris Strauss has been on the Board of Visitors for Moores Cancer Center for several years, and both have been involved in fundraising—most recently for Moores Cancer Center.

In 2010, the couple created the Iris and Matthew Strauss Center for Early Detection of Ovarian Cancer after they lost their youngest daughter, Stefanie, to ovarian cancer. The center is dedicated to investigating methods of early detection with a goal of increasing survival rates. Based on research at the center, scientists identified six mRNA isoforms (bits of genetic



*Iris and Matthew Strauss*

material) produced by ovarian cancer cells but not normal cells, that are required for an early detection diagnostic of ovarian cancer. The technology, licensed by Isommune, is still in development to be used with a Pap smear for early detection.

Their latest gift will support a clinical trial led by Ezra Cohen, MD, professor of medicine and associate director for Translational Science at Moores Cancer Center. Cohen specializes in immunotherapy, a type of treatment that trains a patient's immune system to fight cancer in a way that does not damage healthy tissue.

"We would not have the resources to translate this science into a clinical trial without the support of Iris and Matthew Strauss," said Cohen. "This is the first time a trial like this has been done. The idea of a personalized vaccine that can be applied to all types of cancer by activating the immune cells is unprecedented."

Every cancer has a different molecular makeup based on the mutations and other genetic alterations within the tumor cells. And each person's immune system will respond to different stimuli in disparate ways. In order to make large leaps forward in cancer treatment, Cohen and his team are working to develop a precise vaccine therapy that combines the uniqueness of an individual's cancer with the particular message needed to activate their immune system to fight the toxic cells.

"We are pleased to support this groundbreaking work and hope that our gift will help our community and the world in understanding and treating cancer better," added Strauss.

[Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health](#), the only [NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center](#) in San Diego, is also one of only a few cancer centers in the country with the capability to explore all facets of immunotherapy. To learn more about Cohen's work and the San Diego Center for Precision Immunotherapy, visit their website [here](#).

---

#### MEDIA CONTACT

**Erika Johnson**, 858-534-9372, [erjohnson@ucsd.edu](mailto:erjohnson@ucsd.edu)

UC San Diego's [Studio Ten 300](#) offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via [studio@ucsd.edu](mailto:studio@ucsd.edu). To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts>.