

Thomas Kipps Receives ACGT Investigator Award

Grant will help fund further testing of gene therapy treatment for leukemia patients

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Citing his on-going development of an immune-mediated gene therapy for intractable B cell leukemia, the Alliance for Cancer Gene Therapy (ACGT) has awarded Thomas J. Kipps, MD, PhD, professor of medicine in the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and deputy director of research operations at the UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center, its 2010 Investigator Award in Clinical Translation of Cell and Gene Therapy.

The award comes with a \$750,000 grant spread over three years. Kipps had previously received a 2005 ACGT Investigator grant to conduct a phase 1 safety trial of the gene therapy approach.

Kipps, who holds the Evelyn and Edwin Tasch Chair in Cancer Research, specializes in chronic lymphocytic leukemia or CLL, the most common form of leukemia among adults in Western societies. CLL is currently considered incurable. More than 50 percent of relapsed CLL patients and 10 to 20 percent of newly diagnosed CLL patients have limited or no response to existing treatments, leading to a poor prognosis for survival.

Most therapy-resistant CLL patients exhibit a gene dysfunction on a particular chromosome. Current therapeutic options for these patients usually involve high-risk immunosuppressive treatments, which further reduces their lifespan. Kipps' alternative approach involves sensitizing leukemia cells to cell death (apoptosis), potentially making future treatments faster and more effective. Early research findings have been corroborated in vitro and in test patients who completed the proposed treatment course and achieved a complete response.

"There is a tremendous amount of new work that's going on to find the effective targets for gene therapy and also the delivery vehicles," said Kipps. "We're seeing some very encouraging results right now that are being translated into clinical trials."

About the Alliance for Cancer Gene Therapy Over the past 10 years, the non-profit ACGT has funded more than \$22 million in grants to some of the nation's top investigators in the field of cell and gene therapy. Gene therapy is the process of introducing genetic material, usually DNA, to fight an acquired or inherited disease. Cell therapy treats disease by infusing or transplanting whole cells into the patient for the same purpose. For more information, visit www.acgtfoundation.org.

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