The 2020–2021 Society Campaign

A Philanthropic Tradition
Driving Scientific Discovery and Ensuring Access to Standard-Setting Care

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THE SOCIETY of MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER
CELEBRATING 75 YEARS of SERVICE
1946–2021
Since 1946, The Society of MSK has provided seed funding to critical research projects—ensuring that MSK patients have access to life-changing cancer care. This year, we honor that legacy with a 2020–2021 campaign that celebrates The Society’s leadership role and its need to continue serving as a force for progress at MSK.

The Society’s generous giving has been essential to MSK’s ability to thrive without limits and help people with cancer worldwide. We share some recent highlights of an enormously successful philanthropic partnership.

The Society is a philanthropic anchor at MSK, supporting ambitious, path-breaking programs that touch the lives of people everywhere affected by cancer.

LISA M. DEANGELESI, MD

ESTABLISHING A NEW TREATMENT PARADIGM

In 2010, The Society committed funds to world-renowned dermatologist Allan Halpern, MD, to advance care for people with metastatic melanoma. Dr. Halpern was part of an MSK effort that included medical oncologist Jedd Wolchok, MD, PhD, the Lloyd J. Old/Virginia and Daniel K. Ludwig Chair for Clinical Investigation, and future Nobel Prize–winning immunologist James Allison, PhD. The team was developing and testing the first modern immunotherapies (drugs that stimulate or suppress the immune system to help the body fight disease) to treat patients with late-stage melanoma.

Prior to 2011, there were only two FDA-approved therapies for metastatic melanoma. Both were unimpressive. The Society, by recognizing the promise of Dr. Halpern’s work, helped him and his colleagues achieve an extraordinary milestone: clinical studies that
brought the first improvements in care for people with melanoma. Their efforts helped create a new treatment paradigm and spurred the advent of single and combination immunotherapies for many types of cancer. Today, the challenge of immunotherapy has changed from “Can it work?” to “Can its benefits be extended to more people?”

DISCOVERING THE PATHWAYS OF METASTASIS

In 2018, The Society generously gave to the lab of Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis Foundation Chair Joan Massagué, PhD, a world authority on metastasis, the spread of cancer that causes 90% of cancer deaths. This valuable funding helped support investigations that led Dr. Massagué and his colleagues to elucidate the gauntlet of biological challenges that breakaway tumors must confront to establish a metastatic tumor: acquiring regenerative behavior, evading the immune system, and adapting to a new environment.

Now this eminent MSK scientist and his talented collaborators aim to identify the molecular mechanisms that are necessary for metastasis across tumor types and that constitute choke points where the metastatic process might be brought to a halt.

We now understand metastasis as the regeneration of the wrong tissue, the tumor, in the wrong place—distant vital organs.

The Society’s philanthropy has helped make these advances possible, spurring new avenues of research aimed at discovering novel ways to prevent cancer from spreading and to treat it when it has.

TARGETING CANCER-DRIVING MUTATIONS IN KIDS

In 2017, The Society made a gift to the new Pediatric Translational Medicine Program, driving the introduction of personalized medicine for kids with cancer. The brainchild of Andrew Kung, MD, PhD, Lila Acheson Wallace Chair for Pediatric Research, and pediatric hematologist-oncologist Neerav Shukla, MD, this pioneering program harnesses genomic sequencing to develop and deliver less toxic, targeted treatments that can help children survive cancer.

In 2018, Dr. Shukla was leading a clinical trial for larotrectinib (Vitrakvi®), a drug that specifically targets NTRK, a mutation associated with rare cancers. From the results of the pediatric genomic sequencing offered at MSK, doctors determined that NTRK was the cause of a large, inoperable tumor on the shoulder of a baby girl, Rihanna, and her parents enrolled her in the study. Larotrectinib shrunk Rihanna’s tumor down to a fraction of its original size, allowing for surgical removal. Today, she is healthy and thriving. Ongoing support for personalized medicine initiatives at MSK Kids will ensure such extraordinary progress reaches more families.

The Pediatric Translational Medicine Program moves ideas and observations from the lab to the children who need them.

Providing a basic necessity: food

In 2019, The Society stepped forward to meet an essential human need by supporting the expansion of MSK’s Food to Overcome Outcomes Disparities (FOOD) Program, led by Francesca Gany, MD, MS, a recognized expert in disparities that affect human health. MSK patients who do not have enough healthful food are likely to experience worse outcomes than patients who do.
A diet lacking nutritional quality and quantity may also trigger a cascade of mental and physical health problems in a person diagnosed with cancer, including less adherence to treatment regimens and longer recovery times.

The Society, by thoughtfully supporting FOOD pantry expansion to MSK’s regional sites, helped provide a reliable, no-cost resource that patients can turn to for a critical need. People receive groceries tailored to provide optimal nutrition based on their cancer diagnoses. In 2020, FOOD swiftly responded to escalating urgencies driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which approximately 1 out of every 4 New Yorkers are now food insecure. Some pantry bags are being delivered to vulnerable, homebound individuals. Ongoing support will ensure that every FOOD recipient will have the best chance to survive cancer.

RELIEVING PATIENTS FROM THE FINANCIAL TOXICITY OF CANCER

In 2019, The Society helped advance a key tenet of MSK’s mission: ensuring access to care for all MSK patients, including people who face economic hardships. Beyond medical bills, people with cancer and their families may struggle to pay for necessities such as housing, food, and transportation. In a longstanding tradition of leadership, The Society made a generous contribution to the Social Work Patient Fund, a program that helps patients and loved ones meet the nonmedical costs of cancer care.

Today, for example, a 41-year-old Pennsylvania woman, whose treatment regimen has left her unable to work, continues to receive chemotherapy for metastatic cancer at MSK. The Social Work Patient Fund has provided her with more than $4,000 for transportation, a hotel, and food. Continued support will ensure that every beneficiary has access to advanced care that may only be available at MSK.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO HEALTH EQUITY IN CANCER

In 2019, The Society funded the Cancer Health Equity Research Program (CHERP), a landmark initiative led by surgeon Carol Brown, MD, FACOG, FACS, to address healthcare disparities that particularly affect the Black community. In her research, Dr. Brown found a clear association between high-volume cancer care at local hospitals and poorer outcomes for underserved people. Through CHERP, MSK now partners with community hospitals to support life-changing clinical trials at their own sites.

Understanding the different biology of certain cancers that disproportionately affect Black patients is also part of the effort. MSK is genetically profiling certain tumors so that treatment recommendations and developments bring direct benefits to people with cancer here and elsewhere.

If necessary, MSK will help navigate a person with a rare tumor from a local hospital to an MSK clinical study site. Continued support of CHERP will help level the playing field in delivering the transformative benefits of expert care.

One of the best ways to eliminate cancer disparities is to get more people with cancer to enroll in clinical trials.

CAROL BROWN, MD, FACOG, FACS

For years, The Society has made grants that have allowed MSK researchers to exploit weaknesses in cancer’s armor with remarkable new therapies—and ensured that MSK patients and their families have access to standard-setting care. In a philanthropic tradition that continues to transform lives, The Society of MSK is helping to shape a future in which every type of cancer is understood and treated.
ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF MSK

The Society of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, founded in 1946, is a volunteer-led organization within MSK dedicated to promoting the well-being of patients, supporting cancer research, and providing public education on the early prevention, detection, and treatment of cancer.

As the world’s oldest and largest private cancer center, MSK has devoted more than 135 years to advancing the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer. With a passionate commitment to exceptional patient care, cutting-edge research, and superb educational programs, MSK has earned the distinction of being one of the premier cancer centers worldwide.
FEATURED MSK RESEARCHERS

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