

First-of-Its-Kind Initiative to Increase Diversity in Cancer Clinical Trials

Stand Up To Cancer's Health Equity Initiative aims to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in cancer research and improve outcomes for minority populations.

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Stand Up To Cancer (SU2C) has announced a groundbreaking initiative to increase minority representation in cancer clinical trials. All future SU2C-supported research grant proposals will now be required to include and address crucial issues related to recruitment and retention of patients from ethnic groups to improve diverse participation in cancer clinical trials. The announcement was made at Stand Up To Cancer's annual Scientific Summit, which is attended by SU2C's leadership and 300+ prominent cancer researchers representing each of SU2C's Dream Teams, Research Teams and individual grants.

The lack of diverse participation in cancer clinical trials has been ongoing for decades, largely due to socio-economic, cultural, trust and other barriers.

"As one of the leading funders of cancer research, we believe it is our duty to ensure that minority representation in cancer clinical trials is addressed. Now, more than ever, better understanding of the role of biology in cancer treatment, advances in precision treatment, and development of new technologies demands that we also make significant improvements in diverse clinical trial participation," said SU2C CEO Sung Poblete, PhD, RN. "We are confident that this initiative will make a significant and meaningful impact to ensure all communities have equal access to potentially life-saving treatments."

Despite an overall decline in U.S. cancer deaths since 1991, not all patients have benefited equally from advances in prevention, early detection, precision medicine and targeted cancer treatments. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, currently only 4 percent of clinical trial participants are black, and four percent are Hispanic, and 15 percent are Asian, despite minority groups overall in the U.S. having both the highest death rate and shortest survival rate for most cancers.

SU2C's Committee for Health Equity in Cancer Clinical Trials in collaboration with SU2C scientific leadership, has developed procurement language that will now be used to solicit proposals for SU2C Dream Teams, Research Teams and other grants in the SU2C research portfolio to increase diverse participation in cancer clinical trials. SU2C now requires applicants for funding to include

three critical components related to health equity:

- an indication of whether the research will address the populations expected to benefit from widespread use of newly developed treatments;
- patient recruitment and retention plans for including historically underrepresented racial and ethnic populations — such as the need for additional trial sites or mechanisms to reduce barriers to access; and
- a letter of support from the lead institution’s Chief Diversity Officer, or an equivalent position.

By requiring these to be included in all proposals submitted moving forward, these factors will also be considered both in SU2C’s rigorous selection process, and as part of grant performance evaluation conducted in SU2C’s formal semi-annual reviews.

In addition, Stand Up To Cancer announced plans to fund up to \$6.4 million for the SU2C Health Equity Breakthroughs Research Team researching cancers affecting underrepresented populations, supported by a transformational grant from Genentech, a member of the Roche Group. SU2C is expected to issue the [Request for Applications seeking proposals later in the first quarter of 2020. Proposals may address cancers that have a higher prevalence in a specific racial or ethnic population; cancers that are more deadly among specific minority populations; or may address the need for more effective treatments for specific cancers for patients of diverse backgrounds.

“Genentech is committed to improving the health and well-being of all patients, which means ensuring that scientific research and innovative treatment options are developed for every individual,” said Quita Highsmith, chief diversity officer at Genentech. “We are honored to partner with SU2C to support groundbreaking research that promotes health equity while working to revolutionize cancer care.”

The SU2C Health Equity Breakthroughs Research Team will be selected and launched in 2020. For information, or to receive the Call for Ideas when it is issued, please visit “[Funding Opportunities.](#)” To learn more about Genentech’s efforts in this area, please visit “[Advancing Inclusive Research.](#)”

At the Summit, Stand Up To Cancer also introduced the new international SU2C Gastric Cancer Interception Research Team, which includes investigators from Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center; University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine; University of Chicago; City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center; Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and Samsung Medical Center (South Korea).

While gastric (stomach) cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer death worldwide, it is more common in black, Hispanic, and Asian people than in white populations. New ways are needed to detect these cancers early, when they can be successfully treated. This \$3MM Research Team is

conducting intensive studies to identify biomarkers, such as particular bits of DNA, and cells shed from the tumor that circulate in the blood system and indicate the presence of gastric cancer. Team members have developed a new detection technology, extending the use of a pill-sized camera that can be swallowed by the patient using a new marker to “light up” cancer cells, allowing the camera to capture images of stomach tissue at risk of developing cancer. If validated in a clinical trial, these methods will help doctors screen people in groups at risk of gastric cancer. Learn more about the SU2C [Gastric Cancer Interception Research Team](#).

“By having Research Teams dedicated to cancers that correlate to, or greatly affect, different racial and ethnic populations, we’ll be able to ensure that strides are being made in cancers that typically affect these populations,” said Edith A. Perez, MD, chairperson of the SU2C Committee for Health Equity in Cancer Clinical Trials. “Support for these teams further demonstrates our commitment to bringing breakthrough therapies to historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and improving overall health equity in cancer research. We are proud and excited to play such a large role in serving this unmet need and look forward to setting the tone for scientific research to come.”

Poblete also noted that SU2C will be collaborating with the Black Women’s Health Imperative (BWHI) and Friends of Cancer Research in Project TEACH: Trained Empowered Advocates for Community Health (Healing), funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). Through education and outreach, this nationwide project will empower black women to effectively engage with researchers and clinicians, and to increase participation of black women in cancer-focused clinical trials.

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