



PRESS RELEASE

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\$S1 MILLION GIFT FROM DIANA KOH FOUNDATION EMPOWERS NEXT GENERATION OF CANCER RESEARCHERS

6 February 2023 – Up and coming young cancer researchers at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS Medicine) and Duke-NUS Medical School will be able to draw on funding support for their work, thanks to a gift of S\$500,000 to each school from the estate of the late Ms Diana Koh, a veteran in the accounting and advisory field in Singapore.

Most current funding opportunities are only available to faculty members or group leaders, with only a handful of grant calls accessible to postdoctoral fellows who have pre-determined projects with the Principal Investigators they work with. To address this gap, the gift totalling S\$1 million shared equally by Duke-NUS and NUS Medicine, managed by the Diana Koh Foundation through the Community Foundation of Singapore and Asia Community Foundation, boosts funding support for research fellows and junior clinicians and augments community engagement efforts to build greater awareness about the advances in cancer research.

Ms Janet Lim, Executor of the Diana Koh Foundation and Ms Koh's cousin, articulated a vision deeply rooted in Diana's legacy. "Diana had had a very successful career in accountancy, but very little time to enjoy it. Cancer struck my cousin very unexpectedly," shared Ms Lim. "In her memory, and aligned with her wishes, we are embarking on a journey to fund more innovative approaches for cancer treatment, especially targeting the next generation of scientists and clinicians."

"The idea that translational research carried out at NUS Medicine and Duke-NUS flows from the science lab to the treatment of patients deeply resonated with the Foundation," Ms Lim added. "The establishment of the Diana Koh Innovative Cancer Research Fund at Duke-NUS and the Diana Koh Young Innovator Grant and Prize at NUS Medicine represent our collective pursuit to challenge the status quo and foster ground-breaking discoveries in cancer treatment."

Diana Koh Innovative Cancer Research Fund

At Duke-NUS, the Diana Koh Innovative Cancer Research Fund was established in July 2023, with the mandate of providing seed grants of up to S\$50,000 to junior faculty, postdoctoral fellows and research scientists with new and innovative ideas for the treatment of cancer. Its aim is to enable aspiring young scientists with the willingness to explore bold, blue-sky ideas to secure the initial funding needed to pursue creative new directions in cancer research.

The fund's inaugural grants were disbursed in December 2023 to seed projects focusing on sarcomas (bone or soft tissue cancers). The first project, led by Assistant Professor Tang Hong Wen from the Cancer & Stem Cell Biology (CSCB) Signature Research Programme at

Duke-NUS, engages in cross-species studies with pre-clinical models to examine the possible genetic causes of rhabdomyosarcoma, the most common paediatric soft-tissue sarcoma which accounts for four per cent of all cancers diagnosed in children in Singapore. The second project, by Senior Research Fellow Mr Alvin Guo from the CSCB Programme, explores the potential of new cancer drug combinations for boosting the immune system to effectively fight sarcomas.

Professor Thomas Coffman, Dean of Duke-NUS, remarked, “We are deeply grateful to the Estate of Ms Diana Koh and Ms Janet Lim, not only for their generous giving, but for their passion in advocating for innovation in cancer research through supporting the next generation of scientists and championing community engagement to help others overcome cancer. We look forward to achieving this together through our philanthropic partnership in the years ahead.”

Diana Koh Young Innovator Grant and Prize

At NUS Medicine, the Diana Koh Young Innovator Grant was established to provide seed funds for post-doctoral researchers and junior clinicians investigating key knowledge gaps in cancer biology and treatment, as well as to create opportunities for the cross-fertilisation of ideas. This Grant is projected to fund up to 26 grants in the next 10 years.

In parallel, the Diana Koh Young Innovator Prize will be awarded to post-graduate students and post-doctoral researchers who have made significant findings in cancer research. The annual prize is valued at S\$1,500 per prize and will be awarded in perpetuity to celebrate the achievements and contributions of students and postdoctoral fellows, who are at the forefront of developing novel cancer treatment options. The Prize aims to benefit more than 50 recipients over the next 20 years, with the aim of incentivising younger generation of researchers to continue building upon the existing contributions of cancer research.

Diana Koh Breakthroughs in Cancer Learning Series

In addition, the Diana Koh Breakthroughs in Cancer Learning Series, an annual learning seminar series jointly supported by NUS Medicine and the NUS Centre for Cancer Research (N2CR), will foster a culture of learning and collaboration by providing budding researchers with more mentorship opportunities with world leaders in cancer research.

Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of NUS Medicine added, “We are humbled by the trust extended by the Estate of Ms Diana Koh and Ms Janet Lim, and their deep commitment towards nurturing the best cancer minds to foster more ground-breaking discoveries in the field of cancer research. This gift allows us to take bigger and bolder steps to catalyse ongoing oncological efforts and challenge what we already know in this field, to drive better and more effective treatments for patients worldwide.”

Renowned oncologist Professor Ashok Venkitaraman, who is the Director of the Cancer Science Institute of Singapore as well as Director of N2CR at NUS Medicine, said, “A revolution in our understanding of the fundamental biology of cancer cells over the past two decades has shepherded an increasing number of new therapies for cancer. It is vital that cancer research efforts continue and even accelerate, so that further ground-breaking research discoveries can improve patient outcomes. With its close associations with three major powerhouse institutes in Singapore, NUS Medicine is uniquely positioned to explore the new frontiers in cancer research.”

The three major agencies in question are the National University Cancer Institute, Singapore, National University Hospital; N2CR at NUS Medicine and the Cancer Science Institute of

Singapore (CSI Singapore), is a research centre hosted by the National University of Singapore. N2CR is a 'comprehensive cancer centre' linking academic faculty from National University of Singapore and the National University Health System with external stakeholders to develop new ways to detect, cure or prevent cancer and to coordinate the training of future leaders in the field.

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About National University of Singapore (NUS)

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education, research and entrepreneurship, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise. We have 16 colleges, faculties and schools across three campuses in Singapore, with more than 40,000 students from 100 countries enriching our vibrant and diverse campus community. We have also established more than 20 NUS Overseas Colleges entrepreneurial hubs around the world.

Our multidisciplinary and real-world approach to education, research and entrepreneurship enables us to work closely with industry, governments and academia to address crucial and complex issues relevant to Asia and the world. Researchers in our faculties, research centres of excellence, corporate labs and more than 30 university-level research institutes focus on themes that include energy; environmental and urban sustainability; treatment and prevention of diseases; active ageing; advanced materials; risk management and resilience of financial systems; Asian studies; and Smart Nation capabilities such as artificial intelligence, data science, operations research and cybersecurity.

For more information on NUS, please visit nus.edu.sg.

About the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine)

The NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine is Singapore's first and largest medical school. Our enduring mission centres on nurturing highly competent, values-driven and inspired healthcare professionals to transform the practice of medicine and improve health around the world.

Through a dynamic and future-oriented five-year curriculum that is inter-disciplinary and inter-professional in nature, our students undergo a holistic learning experience that exposes them to multiple facets of healthcare and prepares them to become visionary leaders and compassionate doctors and nurses of tomorrow. Since the School's founding in 1905, more than 12,000 graduates have passed through our doors.

In our pursuit of health for all, our strategic research programmes focus on innovative, cutting-edge biomedical research with collaborators around the world to deliver high impact solutions

to benefit human lives. The School is the oldest institution of higher learning in the National University of Singapore and a founding institutional member of the National University Health System. It is one of the leading medical schools in Asia and ranks among the best in the world (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2024 by subject and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by subject 2023).

For more information about NUS Medicine, please visit <https://medicine.nus.edu.sg/>.

About Duke-NUS Medical School

Duke-NUS is Singapore's flagship graduate entry medical school, established in 2005 with a strategic, government-led partnership between two world-class institutions: Duke University School of Medicine and the National University of Singapore (NUS). Through an innovative curriculum, students at Duke-NUS are nurtured to become multi-faceted 'Clinicians Plus' poised to steer the healthcare and biomedical ecosystem in Singapore and beyond. A leader in ground-breaking research and translational innovation, Duke-NUS has gained international renown through its five signature research programmes and 10 centres. The enduring impact of its discoveries is amplified by its successful Academic Medicine partnership with Singapore Health Services (SingHealth), Singapore's largest healthcare group. This strategic alliance has spawned 15 Academic Clinical Programmes, which harness multi-disciplinary research and education to transform medicine and improve lives.

For more information, please visit www.duke-nus.edu.sg