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Stephenson Global Scholar Grants Award $6.7 Million to Accelerate Pancreatic Cancer Breakthroughs

- **SGPCRI awards $6.7 million to investigators leading eight innovative pancreatic cancer research projects**
- **Funded projects span early detection, cancer interception, immunotherapy and treatment resistance**

LOS ANGELES, August 3, 2026— The Stephenson Global Pancreatic Cancer Research Institute (SGPCRI) today announced the recipients of the 2026 Stephenson Global Scholar Grants. In partnership with City of Hope, one of the largest and most advanced cancer research and treatment organizations in the United States, SGPCRI is awarding $6.7 million to support eight ambitious projects aimed at changing the trajectory of pancreatic cancer.

The eight funded projects span the full continuum of pancreatic cancer research, from prevention and early detection to next-generation therapies. Together, they address some of the field's most pressing challenges, including identifying which precancerous lesions are most likely to become cancerous, developing blood-based tools for earlier detection, overcoming the immune barriers that make pancreatic tumors resistant to treatment, and preventing resistance to emerging KRAS-targeted therapies.

"Every investment we make is driven by one goal: to urgently end pancreatic cancer**,"** said A. Emmet Stephenson Jr., co-founder of SGPCRI. **"**Our mission is to identify, fund, and accelerate the most innovative research in the field, wherever it exists. By empowering exceptional scientists to pursue transformative ideas, we hope to speed the discoveries that will prevent pancreatic cancer, detect it earlier, and deliver more effective treatments to patients worldwide."

The Stephenson Scientific Advisory Board noted that these projects stood out for their scientific rigor, originality, and potential to redefine how we prevent, detect, and treat pancreatic cancer. Together, they reflect the innovative thinking needed to make meaningful progress against this devastating disease.

The funded projects reflect this vision through innovative approaches with the potential to transform patient care. Investigators will develop a blood-based test to predict whether pancreatic cysts are likely to progress to cancer, identify the molecular features that distinguish high-risk pancreatic precancers, and uncover hidden tumor antigens that could become targets for vaccines and cellular therapies. Other projects will advance antibody-based

immunotherapies, identify new therapeutic vulnerabilities in pancreatic cancer cells, and evaluate strategies to prevent resistance to promising KRAS-targeted therapies.

The Stephenson Global Pancreatic Cancer Research Institute was established by A. Emmet Stephenson Jr. and Tessa Stephenson Brand in honor of their beloved wife and mother, Toni Lyn Stephenson, who tragically passed away from pancreatic cancer in 2020. Inspired by her legacy, they made a transformative $150 million commitment, representing approximately two-thirds of the funding currently directed toward pancreatic cancer research, to accelerate the most innovative science and empower investigators with the resources and freedom to pursue transformative discoveries without the delays and administrative burdens of traditional funding mechanisms.

“We created SGPCRI to support investigators who are willing to challenge conventional thinking and pursue ideas with the potential to fundamentally change pancreatic cancer outcomes,” said Tessa Stephenson Brand, co-founder of SGPCRI. “My mother's story remains at the heart of this work. We never want another family to experience the heartbreak of losing someone they love to this disease. These investigators are giving us hope that one day, they won't have to.”

"The investigators selected this year represent the next generation of pancreatic cancer research," said Jennifer Chun Kim, executive director of SGPCRI. "As breakthroughs in KRAS targeted therapies begin to transform patient care, we have an unprecedented opportunity to build on that momentum. Ending pancreatic cancer will require a comprehensive approach that advances prevention, early detection, immunotherapy, interception, and innovative new treatment strategies alongside targeted therapies. By investing in outstanding investigators across these key areas, SGPCRI is helping accelerate the discoveries that will bring us closer to ending pancreatic cancer.”

2026 Stephenson Global Scholar Grant Recipients

Jenn Abelin, Ph.D., senior group leader of the Proteomics Platform at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, and **William Freed-Pastor, M.D., Ph.D.**, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and physician-scientist at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute: Their work will identify hidden tumor antigens displayed by pancreatic cancer cells to advance next-generation cancer vaccines and T-cell therapies.

Ajay Goel, Ph.D., professor and founding chair of the Department of Molecular Diagnostics and Experimental Therapeutics at the Beckman Research Institute of City of Hope. His work will develop a blood-based test to identify pancreatic cysts at highest risk of progressing to cancer.

Erik S. Knudsen, Ph.D., professor of oncology, senior vice president, associate director of basic science research, and chair of the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, and **Agnieszka K. Witkiewicz, M.D.**, professor of oncology and director of the Advanced Tissue Imaging Shared Resource at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center: Their work will target key regulators of cell division to prevent and overcome resistance to RAS-targeted therapies for pancreatic cancer.

Shohei Koide, Ph.D., professor of biochemistry and molecular pharmacology and director of Cancer Biologics at NYU Grossman School of Medicine and NYU Perlmutter Cancer Center: His work will advance antibodies targeting the protein LCN2 to help immune cells infiltrate and attack pancreatic tumors.

Leyuan Ma, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: His work will engineer vaccine-boosted T cells to overcome pancreatic tumors' immunosuppressive defenses and activate the body's own anti-tumor immune response, with the goal of developing an off-the-shelf immunotherapy.

Marina Pasca di Magliano, Ph.D., Maud T. Lane professor of Surgery at the University of Michigan, and **Laura D. Wood, M.D., Ph.D.**, professor of pathology, oncology, and medicine at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine: Their collaborative work will identify the molecular features that distinguish high-risk pancreatic precancers from those unlikely to progress, with the goal of intercepting pancreatic cancer before it develops.

Cristian Prieto-García, D.V.M., Ph.D., Ramón y Cajal group leader at the Institute of Biomedicine of Seville (IBiS) and the University of Seville, Spain: His work will evaluate next-generation splicing inhibitors designed to exploit a unique vulnerability in pancreatic cancer cells, causing them to accumulate toxic proteins and die while sparing healthy cells.

Tuomas Tammela, M.D., Ph.D., associate member of the Cancer Biology and Genetics Program at the Sloan Kettering Institute, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center: His work will identify vulnerabilities in aggressive, therapy-resistant pancreatic cancer cells to uncover new strategies for overcoming drug resistance and improving long-term outcomes.

The Stephenson Global Scholar Grants are designed to support investigators at every career stage while removing traditional funding barriers that can slow innovative research. The streamlined application process asks investigators to answer two central questions: *What is your most innovative and impactful idea for changing the trajectory of pancreatic cancer, and what resources are needed to make it possible?*

The 2026 Stephenson Global Prize, a $1 million award honoring a scientist whose discoveries have transformed the field of pancreatic cancer, will be announced and presented live at the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Special Conference on Pancreatic Cancer on September 26, 2026, in San Diego, California. Click here for additional information.

For more information about the Stephenson Global Pancreatic Cancer Research Institute and the Stephenson Global Scholar Grants, visit SGPCRI.global.

About the Stephenson Global Pancreatic Cancer Research Institute

The Stephenson Global Pancreatic Cancer Research Institute (SGPCRI) is dedicated to transforming the future of pancreatic cancer research through groundbreaking innovation, global collaboration and strategic funding initiatives. Established through a transformative $150 million gift from philanthropists A. Emmet Stephenson Jr. and Tessa Stephenson Brand, SGPCRI is

committed to advancing early detection, pioneering treatments and high-impact research to improve patient outcomes. Working with leading scientists, clinicians and institutions worldwide, SGPCRI fosters collaboration to accelerate breakthroughs in the fight against one of the world's most challenging cancers. For more information, visit SGPCRI.global or follow SGPCRI on LinkedIn and X.

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