

Simmons Fund for Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis at The University of Pittsburgh

Press Release

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The Simmons Fund for Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (www.simmonsfund.pitt.edu) has awarded its first medical research grant to Carol Feghali-Bostwick, PhD of the University of Pittsburgh. Professor Feghali-Bostwick is an assistant professor of medicine and pathology in the School of Medicine. With this \$50,000 two-year grant, Dr. Feghali-Bostwick will study the molecular features of usual interstitial pneumonia in scleroderma.

Pulmonary fibrosis is a complication of several diseases including idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) and systemic sclerosis (SSc, or scleroderma). Pulmonary fibrosis in SSc exhibits the same histological pattern as IPF: usual interstitial pneumonia (UIP) and nonspecific interstitial pneumonia (NSIP) are the predominant patterns in both conditions. Dr. Feghali-Bostwick will research whether the genes aberrantly regulated in SSc/UIP may be similar to those in IPF/UIP. To identify the gene expression profile of UIP, she proposes to analyze lung tissues from IPF/UIP and SSc/UIP patients who underwent lung transplant surgery at the University of Pittsburgh compared to normal donor tissues. She hopes to identify UIP and fibrosis-specific “signature” revealing genes that are key regulators of pulmonary fibrosis and that can serve as new targets for the development of future therapies.

“We are extremely pleased to make our initial research grant to Dr. Feghali-Bostwick,” said Bruce Seiling, Director of the Simmons Fund. “Her work will benefit the researchers of both idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and scleroderma. This grant was made possible through the generous gifts from our Pittsburgh area friends as well as families from 13 other states.”

The study will allow the identification of genes pertinent for a phenotype specific to usual interstitial pneumonia (UIP). By identifying genes specific to UIP lung tissues and cells, the results will reveal genes important in the pathogenesis of both IPF and SSc.

Dr. Feghali-Bostwick did her undergraduate and graduate work at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. She has a PhD in microbiology and immunology from Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. She is also a serving board member of the National Scleroderma Foundation.

When asked about the uniqueness of this study, Dr. Feghali-Bostwick replied, “The University of Pittsburgh has the largest known collection of primary fibroblasts from SSc and IPF lung tissue. This is a unique collection of SSc and IPF lung tissue and primary fibroblasts cultured from them which we have carefully banked over the past years.”

The Simmons Fund for Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis was established in the fall of 2005 with a generous gift to the University of Pittsburgh by Richard P. Simmons. The Simmons Fund's focus is to raise money to support medical research into the cause and cure of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. Every year, more than 30,000 Americans die from IPF and as many as 83,000 Americans are now living with the disease. The cause of the disease is unknown; therefore there is no cure. There is no FDA-approved treatment program for the disease. About two-thirds of IPF patients die within five years.

For more information contact: Bruce Seiling, seilingbg@upmc.edu, 412-648-6640