Comprehensive Transplant Center Researchers Shine at American Transplant Congress

Luke Preczewski
Administrative Director, CTC

May 1-4, the American Society of Transplant Surgeons (ASTS) and American Society of Transplantation (AST) held their joint annual scientific meeting, the American Transplant Congress (ATC). CTC faculty were extremely visible at the meeting, as presenters of 23 posters and 26 oral presentations/symposia. CTC faculty were authors or co-authors on four plenary addresses which attracted significant attention.

Dr. Michael Abecassis, Professor of Surgery and Founding Director of the CTC, finished his term as President of the ASTS, and delivered his presidential address: “The Luster Cycle of Transplantation” in which he delivered an impassioned plea to transplant scientists to help the field of transplantation remain – as it has been – one of the most exciting and innovative medical sub-specialities. He laid out his vision of a path forward that includes not only short term plans to improve immunosuppression and achieve immune tolerance, but also a grand long-term vision of personalized medicine based on advanced proteomic and genomic analysis and of bio-engineering of organs and tissues to overcome the organ shortage that has long plagued the field and left tens of thousands of patients to die on waiting lists.

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Dr. Joshua Miller, Professor of Surgery and Head of the Immune Monitoring and Tolerance research program for the CTC, was awarded the ASTS-Genentech/Roche Pioneer Award. This award is the highest honor the ASTS gives and recognizes Dr. Miller’s pioneering work in transplantation surgery, most notably his work toward transplant tolerance. It is fitting that Dr. Miller received this award just as two CTC trials, his NIH-funded study of sibling donor-recipient pairs and Dr. Joseph Leventhal’s collaboration with the University of Louisville, have demonstrated induced operational tolerance in multiple patients.

The meeting emphasized the critical areas of transplantation research, now and in the coming years, and CTC faculty were very pleased to find that Northwestern continues to be well aligned with broader trends and well positioned to lead the most important work expected in coming years. Notably, the meeting highlighted the rise of genomic and proteomic analysis, which Drs. Abecassis, Friedewald, Levitsky, and Jie are leading as part of the CTOT consortium and in their collaborations with Dr. Dan Salomon at the Scripps Research Institute and Dr. Manikkam Suthanthiran at New York Presbyterian – Cornell. Several speakers generated buzz about the importance of bio-engineered organs and tissues to the next phase of research, which Northwestern will be engaged in following the recruitment of Dr. Jason Wertheim, a surgeon-engineer-immunologist joining the CTC in August. Outcomes and health services research continues to be a major topic, with the CTC's NUTORC collaboration, led by Dr. Daniela Ladner, emerging as one of the top two or three research groups in this area.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the chairs of next year’s meeting highlighted the talks they found most exciting in the annual “What’s Hot, What’s New?” presentation. Again, the CTC performed well, with two talks, Dr. Talia Baker’s plenary address from the A2ALL consortium, and a talk from Luke Preczewski, Administrative Director of the CTC, on UNOS’ compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act. Immediately after the meeting, Northwestern researchers began work on abstracts for next year’s meeting, where the CTC is again expected to stand out as a leading force in transplantation research.