Transplant Endowment Fund Pilot Grants

In 2016, the Northwestern Medicine Transplant Advisory Council (NMTAC), an inspired group of organ recipients, donors and their families that are united in a mission to support the future of organ transplantation at Northwestern Medicine while connecting and supporting the transplant community, Northwestern Memorial Foundation (NMF) and the Comprehensive Transplant Center (CTC) embarked on a journey to build a $10M endowment fund to support ongoing CTC research efforts. Currently the endowment principle is $1.5M and will start producing a payout in FY2018. The endowment funds will be used to support ambitious, audacious and innovative research that is not typically funded by federal agencies and industry partners but will allow the CTC scientists to explore the next generation of aspirational projects to ensure a sustainable legacy of the relentless pursuit of collaborative and innovative research that has become the hallmark of the CTC.

In the early fall, the Transplant Center received a $25,000 donation. Instead of adding this to the endowment principal, we decided to fund pilot projects in a manner consistent with how we plan to distribute the endowment payout beginning in FY2018. The purpose in funding the pilot projects was threefold: 1) to demonstrate to potential donors how the funds would be used and the process by which funds would be allocated; 2) to demonstrate to faculty members that they could benefit from this process to encourage them to direct patients who are potential donors to the endowment campaign and 3) to test the funding process. An advisory council was established that included CTC faculty, representing all the areas of CTC research, two members of the NMTAC, and representatives from NMF. The committee reviewed and discussed each proposal at length, using a 5 point rating scale. The evaluations were based on five criteria: scientific merit, innovation or “risk”, significance to transplant, likelihood of receiving future funding and the investigator. Based on these criteria, the committee decided to fund pieces of the four proposals listed below. These projects began December 1, 2016.

- Javeed Ansari, MD: $10,000 for his project “Identification and Characterization of HLA-Specific B Cells in Transplant Recipients”
- Eleonora Forte, PhD: $4,000 for her project “Identification of host genes essential for Human Cytomegalovirus latency and reactivation by CRISPR-Cas9 Knockout Screening”
- John Friedewald, MD: $1,000 for his project “Clinical and Genomic Predictors of Outcomes in Kidney Transplantation”
- Silvia Minardi, PhD: $10,000 for her project “Synthosomes: Biomimetic Exosome-like Proteolipid Nanovesicles for Tolerance Delivery in an Islet Transplant Model”

A request for proposals for the next round of funding will be issued in the spring with applications due May 1 with an anticipated project start date of September 1. For more information, please contact Leigh Anne Mixon (lmixon@nm.org).