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Vanderbilt cancer investigators win two national GE cancer research grants

March 27, 2012



Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center investigators have won two of the five global innovation grants awarded by the “**GE Healthymagination Cancer Challenge.**”

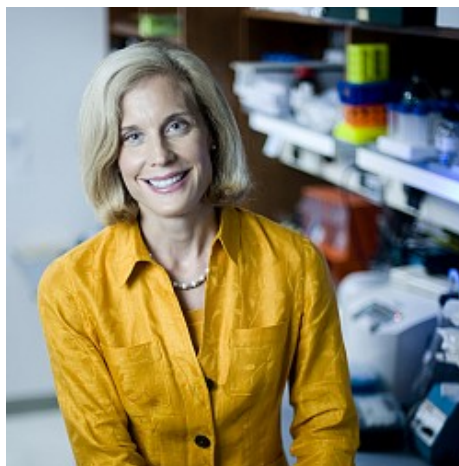
The grants were awarded to Jennifer Pietenpol, Ph.D., director of VICC, and the My Cancer Genome project, developed by Mia Levy, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of Medicine and Biomedical Informatics, and William Pao, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Division of Hematology and Oncology.

Each VICC group will receive \$100,000 from GE to support their cancer research efforts.

The GE Healthymagination Cancer Challenge, launched in September 2011, is part of GE's Healthymagination commitment to accelerate cancer innovation by investing \$1 billion in cancer technology research and development, as well as improve care for 10 million cancer patients around the world by 2020.

More than 500 individuals or groups from at least 40 countries applied for the research grants in an online competition that also allowed scientists and members of the public to comment on the proposals. Applicants could add visual elements to their proposal and both VICC winners submitted videos to enhance their entries.

“I want to express my sincere appreciation to GE for awarding the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center these two grants. The unique and highly competitive process established for these awards by GE is reflected in the creativity and innovation of our faculty, not only in their research, but also in their desire to improve the lives of all cancer patients around the world,” said Jeff Balser, M.D., Ph.D., vice chancellor for Health Affairs and dean of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.



Jennifer Pietenpol, Ph.D., director of the

The laboratory of Jennifer Pietenpol recently identified six subtypes of an aggressive and difficult-to-treat form of breast cancer, called triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC). The study, published in the July issue of the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, was the first research to confirm that TNBC is not just one disease.

“These six subtypes have very different biologies and our findings explain why current therapies haven't been that successful,” said Pietenpol, who is a professor of Biochemistry, Cancer Biology and Otolaryngology.

Pietenpol believes research in the coming

years will show that there are many more than six subtypes of TNBC.

"Our knowledge of each subtype will enable us to personalize therapy for patients suffering from TNBC and that is a very big advance. The next step is to move toward a diagnostic test so that we can individualize therapy. This GE Healthmagination award allows research advanced by Dr. Brian Lehmann, in collaboration with Dr. Steven Chen, to progress more quickly," said Pietenpol.

My Cancer Genome is an online resource that educates clinicians, researchers, patients and caregivers on tumor mutations and available targeted therapies and is the nation's first personalized cancer decision support tool.

Research in cancer genetics is evolving so rapidly that no one person or institution can stay ahead of the changes, so My Cancer Genome, supported by a team of VICC professionals, delivers the information in an easy-to-use online format. By clicking on a mutation for a specific type of cancer, a physician or patient can find out which drugs may be sensitive or resistant in tumors with this mutation, as well as locate open clinical trials available locally, nationally and internationally.

"My Cancer Genome is an innovative way to use information technology to care for patients," said Levy. "We want to make it as easy as possible for patients and their clinicians to find information about therapies that are available for specific tumor gene mutations."

Levy said the fact that two Vanderbilt groups were selected for the GE awards is especially gratifying.

"We were so pleased when we heard that we were one of the challenge winners and were especially delighted that another VICC group also won. They are on the preclinical side in the discovery mode of what these biomarkers are and we are on the translational side of trying to bring that new knowledge to patients and providers so they can make actionable decisions for the patient sitting in front of them. It's a wonderful synergistic environment that we are in and we are pleased that both of these strengths at Vanderbilt were recognized," said Levy.



Mia Levy, assistant professor of Medicine and Biomedical Informatics

The winners of the GE Challenge were selected by an independent judging panel that included venture capital partners, GE executives, and several renowned health care leaders, including former U.S. FDA Commissioner and National Cancer Institute Director, Andrew Von Eschenbach, M.D., professor of Surgery and director of the University of Michigan Breast Care Center, Lisa Newman, M.D., and cancer medicine specialist and Imperial College's professor of Cancer Medicine, Justin Stebbing, M.D., Ph.D.

Information about the entries is available at www.healthmagination.com/challenge.



William Pao, M.D., Ph.D., director
of the Division of Hematology and
Oncology

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Media Inquiries:

Dagny Stuart McMillin

Information and Media Relations Officer

News & Communications

Phone: 615-322-4747

Email: dagny.stuart@vanderbilt.edu

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