

2019 Lupus Insight Prize Awarded to Dr. Ignacio Sanz: Recognizes Studies of Harmful Immune Cells in Lupus

BOSTON, Mass., June 19, 2019 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – The [Lupus Research Alliance](#) has awarded its 2019 Lupus Insight Prize to Ignacio Sanz, MD, for discovering that certain little-understood immune system cells are a major source of the harmful proteins that promote lupus symptoms. His work could spark new treatments for the disease and help doctors determine which patients could benefit from current drugs. Dr. Sanz is a Mason Lowance Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics and Chief of the Division of Rheumatology at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia.



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The award was announced June 19 at FOCIS 2019, the 19th Annual Meeting of the Federation of Clinical Immunology Societies (FOCIS). The \$100,000 award recognizes a major, novel insight and/or discovery with the promise of changing thinking about lupus as well as a high probability of generating further advances in the diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

“Dr. Sanz has already made vital contributions to understanding the role of B cells in lupus,” said Kenneth M. Farber, President and CEO, Lupus Research

Alliance. “We very much look forward to his next advances afforded by our Lupus Insight Prize.”

Dr. Sanz’s discoveries were a breakthrough for understanding how certain B cells, a type of immune cell, promote lupus. B cells are key for the disease. Their normal job is to produce proteins called antibodies that protect against bacteria and viruses. But in lupus, B cells release antibodies that trigger damage to patients’ own tissues. Researchers have known that some B cells must mature in specialized parts of the lymph nodes or spleen before they can make these destructive antibodies.

Dr. Sanz showed that many damaging B cells follow a different route and identified the molecular mechanisms that underpin this B cell activation pathway. He and his team were the first to apply a comprehensive characterization of these cells using cutting-edge techniques such as multidimensional flow cytometry analysis of DNA in lupus patients. They found that this group of B cells was prevalent in patients who were undergoing lupus flares, particularly African-Americans. Dr. Sanz and his colleagues also found that, in contrast to healthy subjects, the lupus B cells were ready to transform into cells that produce harmful antibodies, even in patients without active disease.

“I thank the Lupus Research Alliance for recognizing my work, and I am eager to pursue further research with the potential for improving patient treatment,” said Dr. Sanz.

Researchers may be able to build on Dr. Sanz’ discoveries to develop new drugs that could reduce patients’ risk and severity of disease flares. The results could also help doctors identify subsets of lupus patients that are more likely to benefit from therapies that destroy B cells using existing drugs. In addition, the cellular and molecular make-up of the abnormal lupus B cells should help identify new therapeutic targets.

About Lupus

Lupus is a chronic, complex autoimmune disease that affects millions of people worldwide. More than 90% of people with lupus are women; lupus most often strikes during the childbearing years of 15-45. African Americans, Latin Americans, Asians and Native Americans are two to three times at greater risk than Caucasians. In lupus, the immune system, which is designed to protect against infection, creates antibodies that can attack any part of the body including the kidneys, brain, heart, lungs, blood, skin, and joints.

About the Lupus Research Alliance

The [Lupus Research Alliance](#) aims to transform treatment while advancing toward a cure by funding the most innovative lupus research in the world. The organization’s stringent peer review grant process fosters diverse scientific talent who are driving discovery toward better diagnostics, improved treatments and ultimately a cure for lupus. Because the Lupus Research Alliance’s Board of Directors funds all administrative and fundraising costs, 100% of all donations goes to support lupus research programs.

Learn more at: <https://www.lupusresearch.org/>

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