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## Foundation grant supports cancer therapy breakthrough

Preliminary findings from an investigation funded in part by the OMS Foundation indicate that an immunotherapy drug embedded in a slow-release hydrogel appears to be highly effective at killing cancer cells.

According to its developers, STINGel combines a new class of immunotherapy drugs called stimulator of interferon gene (STING) agonists with an injectable hydrogel that releases the drug in a steady dose to activate the immune system to kill cancer cells. The biogel was developed by Simon Young, DDS, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth), and Rice University chemist and bioengineer Jeffrey Hartgerink, PhD. The OMS Foundation selected the project for a \$75,000 Research Support Grant in 2017.

Immunotherapy drugs in clinical trials have shown promising results in advanced cases of head and neck cancer. However, the most effective strategies benefit just 15 to 20 percent of patients, said Dr. Young, and the drugs require multiple injections (sometimes indefinitely).

The new research, detailed in the *Biomaterials* journal, showed that slow-release multi-domain peptide gels (MDP) were more effective than common hydrogels in continuously delivering immunotherapy drugs to tumor sites for long periods of time. The MDP hydrogel, injected as a liquid, turns semisolid inside the body and slowly degrades over time, said Dr. Young. Immunotherapy drugs known as cyclic dinucleotides (CDNs) embedded in the gel specifically target cancer cells.

“The MDP gels developed by Dr. Hartgerink’s lab have been used in tissue engineering applications before,” said Dr. Young, “but we were entering uncharted territory using this system in a cancer immunotherapy context. While CDNs are quite effective in treating melanoma, they have been completely ineffective as monotherapy in mouse models of head and neck cancer.”

According to Drs. Young and Hartgerink, the concentration of CDN in the hydrogel is crucial. Delivery of CDN via simple injection results in rapid diffusion of the drug throughout the body, lessening its concentration at the tumor site. Delivering the same amount of CDN via STINGel concentrates the drug near the tumor for longer periods of time, increasing its effectiveness.

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## Our donors' return on investment? Groundbreaking OMS research!

One of the most gratifying privileges of my position as Chair of the OMS Foundation is seeing my signature at the bottom of the award letters sent to our grant recipients.

My fellow Board members and I are most often regarded as fundraisers, and rightfully so. As the Foundation's first-string champions for research and education, our role is to raise the funds that support it.

The reward for the hard work of fundraising, though, lies in the disbursement of the money we have raised. In January, three OMS research teams received an infusion of confidence and monetary support when their Research Support Grant award letters arrived in the mail. Their investigations are as diverse as their geography, and each promises to contribute to the knowledge bank that educates and advances our profession.

A University of Pennsylvania research team headed by Dr. Rabie Shanti was selected for the Foundation's Stephen B. Milam Award (recognizing the highest-scoring Research Support Grant proposal) for its investigation of an innovative strategy for facial nerve regeneration.

In addition, researchers at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston and Rice University received funding to study a new immunotherapy model for head and neck cancer patients (read more in this issue's cover story). A third grant awarded to a team at East Carolina University will support its work to improve outcomes for children undergoing primary palatoplasty.

The work being conducted in these labs has potential to be life-changing for our patients. And it is gratifying to know this research was made possible, in part, through the past generosity of donors just like you – practitioners, retirees, researchers, residents, Alliance members and OMSNIC agents. Every gift to the Foundation is an investment in the future and a commitment to support those who will follow in our footsteps.

Now, even as we celebrate the milestones of AAOMS's first 100 years, the OMS Foundation has its sights set on the next 100. The future is deeply rooted in research.

To ensure our upward trajectory remains unswerving, we are offering a once-in-a-century recognition opportunity to our OMS Foundation donors in 2018. We have reserved a wall in the AAOMS headquarters to display a stately tree, its shimmering leaves inscribed with the names of donors, practices, societies and other friends of our specialty.

This is our anniversary gift to AAOMS and the next generation of OMS practitioners: a commitment to supporting the research and education that keeps us moving forward. I cannot think of a more meaningful gift to mark this momentous occasion.

*Kathy A. Banks, DMD*



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Anthony Spina, DDS, MD  
OMSNIC Director

## OMSNIC's alliance serves the specialty well

By Anthony Spina, DDS, MD  
OMSNIC Director

Since 1959, the OMS Foundation has funded OMS-specific research and education programs with the goal of improving outcomes for OMS patients.

And since 1987, OMSNIC (originally AAOMS Mutual Insurance Co.) has maintained a similar, singular focus on patient safety.

Given the compatibility of their objectives, it should come as no surprise that OMSNIC would emerge as an early and steadfast supporter of the OMS Foundation.

In 2018, to honor AAOMS's centennial year, OMSNIC announced its desire to make a substantial corporate gift to the Foundation's Annual Fund Campaign. OMSNIC and the Foundation subsequently agreed OMSNIC would fund a \$100,000 gift-match challenge with a deadline of April 30 to generate excitement and momentum during the early stage of the campaign.

The prospect of doubling the value of their gift inspired many Foundation donors to give early, and the Foundation's Centennial Tree recognition opportunity inspired them to new levels of generosity.

As a fundraising strategy, the gift match was a resounding success. By April 30, the Foundation raised substantially more than the \$100,000 required to qualify for OMSNIC's matching gift, and the 2018 campaign "Celebrating our Past, Envisioning our Future" was off to a strong start.

It is OMSNIC's hope the momentum generated by the gift match will propel the campaign to a successful finish.

OMSNIC's support of the Foundation has taken many forms, including an annual gift to the Foundation Alliance's Norma L. Kelly Resident Spouse Scholarship program. Spouses of OMS residents are eligible to apply for up to \$1,000 to offset the expense of traveling with their partner to the AAOMS Annual Meeting. OMSNIC's donation is meant to honor the many OMSs who serve on committees of the OMSNIC Board of Directors, its OMSNICase Review Committee, advisory board, faculty council and resident consultants.

Such selfless service to the specialty deserves special recognition. OMSNIC believes the spouse scholarship fund is an excellent way to recognize the value of their contributions.

OMSNIC's support is not limited to corporate donations. Many of OMSNIC's directors also have served on the Foundation's Board, and legacy gifts to the Foundation from OMSNIC directors have ensured OMSNIC is well-represented on the Foundation's Robert V. Walker Society roster.

OMSNIC's independent agents also have contributed significantly to the Foundation and are currently midway through a five-year campaign to raise more than \$50,000.

OMSNIC serves the specialty and, as an OMS-owned and -operated company, we watch for opportunities to give back to the specialty. Support for the Foundation and its mission to fund research and education is one significant way OMSNIC achieves this goal.

**Donations to the OMS Foundation significantly exceeded the \$100,000 needed to meet OMSNIC's gift-match challenge. Thank you, OMSNIC, for all you do to support the OMS Foundation!**

*The 2017-18 OMSNIC Board of Directors:*

*Standing from left: Michael J. Stroncsek, DDS, MS; William C. Passolt, CPS; James Q. Swift, DDS; Nicholas J. Bournias, DDS; Katherine A. Ehmann, CPA; Colin S. Bell, DDS, MDS; Anthony M. Spina, DDS, MD.*

*Seated from left: Patricia A. Pigoni; Robert F. Guyette, DMD, MD.*



2017-18 OMSNIC Board of Directors

## Save the date

OMS FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES AT 2018 AAOMS ANNUAL MEETING

Oct. 11-13	OMS Foundation Booth	Oct. 10-12	Post-Walk Alliance Breakfasts at York
Oct. 10-12	Alliance Health Walks at 7:30 each morning	Oct. 11	Alliance Annual Event in the Signature Room at the 95th

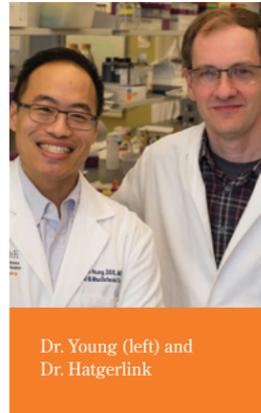
## Cancer therapy breakthrough

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In preclinical trials, six groups of 10 rodents each were treated with CDN alone, control collagen gels (with and without CDN), MDP alone or STINGel (MDP with CDN). Only one in 10 rodents treated with CDN or collagen-plus-CDN survived 105 days. Six of the 10 animals treated with STINGel survived and proved resistant to further implantation of cancer cells after 100 days, implying their immune systems were trained to successfully identify and destroy both the existing cancer and future occurrence of that cancer.

“Frankly, we were shocked at how well STINGel performed in this preliminary trial,” Dr. Young said. “This is the first time anyone has shown that a single injection of CDN in a preclinical model of head and neck cancer can have this sort of efficacy and durability – simply by combining it with these MDP gels. Dr. Hartgerink and I are grateful to the OMS Foundation for supporting this initial work and we intend to further explore the mechanisms of why STINGel is so effective. By optimizing our approach, learning more about the challenging tumor microenvironment and securing funding for additional clinical trials, we hope to improve the survival rates of patients affected by head and neck cancer.”

The research also was supported by the National Institutes of Health, the Welch Foundation, the National Science Foundation and the Mexican National Council for Science and Technology.



Dr. Young (left) and Dr. Hatgerink

## OMS Foundation approves \$650,000+ in funding

The OMS Foundation Board of Directors approved \$657,500 to fund OMS-specific research and education in 2017.

Funded programs include:

- Three Research Support Grants (\$225,000)
- One Student Research Training Award (\$12,500)\*
- Ten scholarships (\$1,000) each for residents to attend the Clinical Trials Methods Course (\$10,000)\*
- Three Faculty Educator Development Awards (FEDA) (\$390,000)\*†
- Sponsorship of AAOMS/OMS Foundation Clinical Trials Methods Course (\$15,000)\*
- Sponsorship of AAOMS Resident Transitions into Practice Conference (\$5,000)\*

\*Funded in part by the Foundation Alliance Committee.

†Two additional FEDA recipients will be chosen in 2018 with funding provided by AAOMS. A total of five FEDA recipients will be chosen in 2018 with additional funding provided by AAOMS.

### Research Support Grants

The Stephen B. Milam Research Support Grant is awarded to the application scored highest by the OMS Foundation Committee on Research. Rabie Shanti, DMD, MD, and Qunzhou Zhang, PhD, of the University of Pennsylvania are the recipients for their research project, “Application of Neural Progenitor-like Cells Induced from Gingiva-derived Mesenchymal Stem Cells in Facial Nerve Regeneration in Rats.”

Additional 2017 Research Support Grants (also \$75,000 each) have been awarded to:

- “Investigation of Anatomical Changes Associated with the Use of a Pedicled Buccal Fat Pad Graft Used During Primary Palatoplasty” (East Carolina University; PI: Jamie Perry, PhD, and Michael S. Jaskolka, DDS, MD, FACS)
- “Exploring Mechanisms to Improve STINGel Immunotherapy in Head and Neck Cancer” (University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston; Simon Young, DDS, MD, PhD, and Jeffrey Hartgerink, PhD)

### Student Research Training Award

Awarded directly to institutions, this award supports student research projects with the aim to attract qualified students to the OMS specialty. The 2017 recipient is:

- University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine, Steven Wang, DMD, MD, MPH, Program Director

## Alliance announces Annual Meeting events

The OMS Foundation Alliance will host morning health walks, breakfasts and its eagerly anticipated annual event during the 2018 AAOMS Annual Meeting in Chicago.

Spouses, staff and friends of OMSs are welcome to join the Alliance on the health walks from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. Oct. 10 to 12. The walkers will end their route at York at 1120 S. Michigan Ave. for breakfast.

The Alliance Annual Event will take place Oct. 11 in The Signature Room at the 95th, 875 N. Michigan Ave. Attendees will enjoy a buffet, prizes and more. The annual event supports the Foundation.

Visit [OMSFoundation.org/alliance/events](http://OMSFoundation.org/alliance/events) for more information.



2017 Resident Spouse Scholarship Winners

## Resident spouses: Apply for travel scholarships

The OMS Foundation Alliance is accepting applications for scholarships to offset travel expenses of resident spouses attending the AAOMS Annual Meeting. Applications will be accepted from May 15 to 11:59 p.m. CDT July 31.

Scholarship recipients attend Alliance events at the AAOMS Annual Meeting, where they can network and connect with the Alliance Committee and other participants.

Information about the scholarships can be found at [OMSFoundation.org/alliance/scholarships](http://OMSFoundation.org/alliance/scholarships). Questions? Call 847-233-4366 or email [programs@omsfoundation.org](mailto:programs@omsfoundation.org).

## Featured Donors: Dr. Douglas and Chris Fain

Donors since 1989

R.V. Walker Society members since 2002

Chris and I feel strongly about giving back to the profession that has provided so much to us and our family. Over the years, I have dedicated gifts to my mentors and role models: Dr. Robert Hiatt, Dr. Dan Lew and Dr. Ed Mosby. This year, I am moved to donate in honor of our current President, Dr. Brett Ferguson, whose involvement in all aspects our profession exceeds that of any colleague in my area. His thoughtfulness and dedication to every assignment and task that he undertakes is an inspiration to me. Our 2018 gift to the Foundation is made in gratitude to Dr. Brett Ferguson for his leadership and friendship as he leads our organization into its second century.



## Featured Donors: Dr. James and Angie Henderson

Donors since 2013

R.V. Walker Society members since 2018

My tenure as an AAOMS Delegate (West Virginia) and our affiliation with the OMS Foundation Alliance have reinforced for Angie and me how incredibly blessed I have been in my career and how much the OMS specialty has done for us. Angie’s experience as a research nurse reminded us daily of the importance of the Foundation’s mission to support research, and we’re inspired by the accomplishments of OMSs (especially residents) who have benefited from Foundation support. We’re committed to giving back to the specialty that has served us so well, and we hope to inspire today’s young OMSs to do the same.



# A fitting legacy for a life well-lived

By J. David Johnson Jr., DDS, OMS Foundation Treasurer

It comes as no surprise to his friends that, following his death, the OMS Foundation received a \$25,000 R.V. Walker contribution from Dr. Jim Ingrassia.

Jim believed in the mission of our Foundation, and his gift is an appropriate symbolic punctuation for a life well-lived. He served as a role model for many oral and maxillofacial surgeons who, like me, had the good fortune of knowing him.

In addition to being a courageous, kind and elegant leader of our specialty, he was the epitome of a true and loyal friend.

Jim attended Ohio State University, where he received degrees in pharmacy and dentistry. At OSU, he met the love of his life, his beautiful wife, Beth. After three years in the Air Force, he entered Ben Irby's program at the Medical University of South Carolina, finishing in 1977. He went into practice in Charleston, where he remained until his retirement in 2006.

I got to know Jim through the Southeastern Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (SSOMS). Jim joined SSOMS in 1980. During the next 26 years, he missed only one SSOMS meeting, the year his father died. Jim became interested in SSOMS leadership in the late 1980s and began to work his way through the committees and officer positions, ascending to the presidency in 2005.

That year, the meeting was at The Cloister at Sea Island. It is a meeting that still holds records for attendance, exhibitor participation and financial success – mostly due to Jim's extraordinary efforts.

Jim's 2005 SSOMS presidential year also was the year he lost his dear wife, Beth, after a five-year battle with cancer. In August 2004, my wife, Elizabeth, was killed in a motor vehicle collision.

Typical of Jim's generous spirit, he decided to dedicate the 2005 SSOMS annual meeting to Beth and Elizabeth. I will never forget the phone call Jim made informing me of this decision. We talked about "our two Beths," our friendship, our careers and our involvement with SSOMS.

My children and I also will never forget the kind – and accurate – comments he made about Elizabeth from the podium during his presidential dinner. At that event, he presented each of my children a rose in honor of their mother.

In 2011, Jim was honored with the SSOMS Distinguished Service Award. At an event during the 2011 SSOMS meeting, I made the point of walking with him, thinking that I was providing him needed support due to the debilitating effects of Parkinson's disease from which he was suffering.

As we slowly walked together, Jim made observations and posed questions that made me realize it was he who was providing the greater level of needed support. At the end of our walk, I found myself wishing to be half the man Jim Ingrassia was.

Jim is missed by his countless friends, and, through his posthumous gift to the Foundation, he continues to serve as an example for all of us.



Dr. Jim Ingrassia  
1941-2017



## Celebrating our Past, Envisioning our Future

Rooted in research, our Foundation needs *your* support to grow and flourish. Donate \$2,500 or more to the OMS Foundation's 2018 Annual Fund campaign to have your name, practice name or an honoree inscribed on a leaf of AAOMS's Centennial Tree. **Just 400 leaves available!**

**Gold**  
\$10,000

**Silver**  
\$5,000

**Bronze**  
\$2,500

**"Our generation inherited a strong, purposeful and progressive specialty from our predecessors. It is our responsibility to pass that torch, burning even brighter, to the next generation of oral and maxillofacial surgeons."**  
**Eric T. Geist, DDS, FACS**



The Centennial Tree will be on permanent display at AAOMS Headquarters. The OMS Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

[OMSFoundation.org](http://OMSFoundation.org)