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Philanthropy News

THE HARRINGTON DISCOVERY INSTITUTE SUPPORTS COVID-19 ANTIBODY THERAPY DEVELOPMENT AT THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

March 29, 2021—The Rockefeller University has received supplemental grant support from the **Harrington Discovery Institute** to help fund the testing of a monoclonal antibody drug for the prevention and early treatment of COVID-19. The drug is the result of a collaborative research effort launched in the first weeks of the pandemic by immunologist **Michel Nussenzweig.**

The Harrington Discovery Institute provided initial funding of $150,000 for the project in July 2020 through its **COVID-19 Rapid Response Initiative**, which named Dr. Nussenzweig one of 12 Coronavirus Scholar Award recipients. In January 2021, HDI issued a $550,000 follow-on grant that will help to cover the costs of a **phase I clinical trial** to assess treatment safety and optimal dosing. That trial began in January at the Rockefeller University Hospital on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

To identify the antibodies best suited for development, a team headed by physician-scientist **Marina Caskey**, a professor of clinical investigation at Rockefeller, recruited and tested nearly 150 people who had recovered from COVID-19 during the first surge of the disease in the New York City area, in April.

“Thanks to the generous volunteers who donated blood plasma and the many researchers bringing their expertise together, we have been able to identify and optimize two potent antibodies that show high potential for preventing or treating COVID-19,” said Michel Nussenzweig, the Zanvil A. Cohn and Ralph M. Steinman Professor and head of the Laboratory of Molecular Immunology at Rockefeller. “We are grateful to the Harrington Discovery Institute for its support of our ongoing efforts.”

Preclinical data suggest that, even at low concentrations, Rockefeller’s monoclonal antibodies can block the coronavirus from gaining entry to human cells. Working together, the dual antibody treatment minimizes the risk of the virus mutating and developing resistance to the therapy.

On February 3, the university entered a **licensing agreement** with the global pharmaceutical company **Bristol Myers Squibb** to develop, manufacture, and commercialize Rockefeller’s novel monoclonal antibodies for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19.

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“While progress made with vaccines has been truly remarkable, it will need to be complemented by creative antiviral approaches if we are to avert this and future pandemics,” said Jonathan S. Stamler, MD, President, Harrington Discovery Institute, Robert S. and Sylvia K. Reitman Family Foundation Distinguished Professor of Cardiovascular Innovation, and Professor of Medicine and of Biochemistry at University Hospitals and Case Western Reserve University. “We are so pleased to see Dr. Nussenzweig’s novel antibody treatment enter clinical trials.”

About Harrington Discovery Institute

The Harrington Discovery Institute at University Hospitals in Cleveland, OH—part of The Harrington Project for Discovery & Development—aims to advance medicine and society by enabling our nation’s most inventive scientists to turn their discoveries into medicines that improve human health. The institute was created in 2012 with a $50 million founding gift from the Harrington family and instantiates the commitment they share with University Hospitals to a Vision for a ‘Better World’. For more information, visit: HarringtonDiscovery.org.

About The Rockefeller University

The Rockefeller University is one of the world’s leading biomedical research universities and is dedicated to conducting innovative, high-quality research to improve the understanding of life for the benefit of humanity. Rockefeller’s 70 laboratories conduct research in neuroscience, immunology, biochemistry, genomics, and many other areas, and a community of more than 2,000 faculty, students, postdocs, technicians, clinicians, and administrative personnel work on the university’s 16-acre Manhattan campus. Rockefeller’s unique approach to science has led to some of the world’s most revolutionary and transformative contributions to biology and medicine. During Rockefeller’s 120-year history, 26 Rockefeller scientists have won Nobel Prizes, 24 have won Albert Lasker Medical Research Awards, and 20 have garnered the National Medal of Science, the highest science award given by the United States.