



SCIENCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANITY

Philanthropy News

DEVELOPER ROBERT WENNETT HOPES TO CATALYZE SUPPORT FOR POTENT HIV ANTIBODY THERAPY WITH GIFT TO ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

March 30, 2021—Miami developer and philanthropist **Robert S. Wennett** pledged a \$1.25 million gift to The Rockefeller University to advance the development of immunologist Michel Nussenzweig’s **potent antibody therapy for the treatment of HIV infection**. The gift, in part, supports the creation of a cell line, the first step in a multi-step process for manufacturing and testing a clinical-grade immunotherapy that can be given to patients.

“Michel’s science inspires me,” said Robert Wennett. “I hope my gift inspires others to support this truly promising therapy. Community is how we survived the onset of AIDS in the 1980s. It would be great if, as a community, we can now help to eradicate the threat of HIV.”

In recent years, Michel Nussenzweig pioneered a robust method to isolate and clone antibodies from people who have developed the rare ability to fight off HIV infection. These broadly neutralizing anti-HIV antibodies are naturally occurring immune system proteins that have been characterized by the Nussenzweig lab and engineered to increase their efficacy. They have been shown to effectively suppress HIV levels without the use of other drugs. In January 2020, the Nussenzweig lab’s portfolio of anti-HIV antibodies was licensed to Gilead Sciences for commercial development.

The funding provided by Robert Wennett is helping the Nussenzweig research group create a new, optimized anti-HIV antibody. This antibody will be bispecific, meaning that it will be able to bind simultaneously to two distinct sites on the virus. Mr. Wennett’s gift also supports the work of a postdoctoral scientist who is developing methods for measuring the reservoir of HIV that can silently and persistently infect human cells. The ability to accurately assess the presence of latent HIV is key to gauging the ability of antibody therapies to wipe out an HIV infection.

“Thanks to engaged and committed donors like Robert Wennett, Michel has the resources to refine his potent HIV immunotherapy—work that also informs his group’s research on other viruses including Zika and hepatitis B,” said Rockefeller University President Richard P. Lifton. “Last spring, in collaboration with virologists at Rockefeller, Michel quickly launched studies into the virus that causes COVID-19. Within less than a year, his lab produced an antibody therapy that was recently licensed by Bristol Myers Squibb.”

“I’m energized by the success we have had creating antibody therapy for HIV infection and COVID-19,” said Michel Nussenzweig. “I am grateful for the support of Robert Wennett. Robert really understands the promise of this approach, not just for HIV but for emerging viral threats.”

“I would love to see an entire center at Rockefeller devoted to global infectious disease research. It would be the kind of resource we desperately needed when AIDS first appeared,” Mr. Wennett noted.

About Robert Wennett

Robert Wennett is President of UIA Management, LLC, and has more than 25 years of experience in acquisitions, structuring, and negotiating real estate transactions aggregating \$3 billion dollars in value. His visionary 1111 Lincoln Road garage designed by Herzog & de Meuron has become an architectural icon.

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 over 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.

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