

Damon Runyon Scientists Gather for 2026 Accelerating Cancer Cures Symposium

Accelerating Cancer Cures (ACC) supports a new generation of clinical investigators as they translate the latest scientific discoveries into new diagnostics and therapeutics for patients.

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Damon Runyon scientists and industry partners gathered on Tuesday, March 24, for the 2026 Accelerating Cancer Cures Research Symposium, hosted by Amgen in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Accelerating Cancer Cures (ACC) is a multi-million-dollar collaborative project aimed at supporting a new generation of clinical investigators as they translate the latest scientific discoveries into new diagnostics and therapeutics for patients. Founded in 2011 and led by the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation, the initiative has included participants from AbbVie, Amgen, ARIAD, Celgene, Eli Lilly and Company, Genentech, Gilead, Merck, Novartis, Pfizer, and Takeda Pharmaceuticals International Co., in addition to scientists from the nation's top universities and research institutes. The annual ACC Research Symposium is designed to foster communication and collaboration between cancer researchers in industry and academia.

Damon Runyon President and CEO Yung S. Lie, PhD, Damon Runyon Board of Directors member and President of Research and Development at BioNTech Richard B. Gaynor, MD, and Executive Vice President of Research and Development at Amgen James Bradner, MD, welcomed symposium attendees to kick off the day's events.

Dr. Bradner, a former Damon Runyon-Rachleff Innovator and award selection committee member, highlighted the strong pipeline of Damon Runyon scientists into Amgen's ranks. "We've started to think of Damon Runyon as the triple-A team for Amgen. The scientists supported by this organization are the best of us — the most brave, the most committed, the most scholarly, the most impassioned.

Following opening remarks from Oliver Thiel, PhD, Vice President of Operations Commercialization at Amgen, Damon Runyon scientists Mark Yarmarkovich, PhD, Lucas Farnung, PhD, Mary M. Mullen, MD, and Ziyang Zhang, PhD, presented updates on their research. Each is working toward a clearer molecular understanding of cancer genomics and gene expression in order to develop more precise targeted therapies.

In a motivating keynote address, Anna Farago, MD, PhD, Vice President of Early Development in Oncology at Amgen, and Julie Bailis, PhD, a former Damon Runyon Fellow and Vice President of Oncology Research at Amgen, discussed Amgen's efforts to advance promising new therapeutics. "It's really the connection between the pre-clinical data predicting how a therapeutic will perform and what information comes back from the clinic that will help us advance new treatments," noted Dr. Bailis about the importance of bringing laboratory science and clinical research into dialogue.

Attendees also heard from Damon Runyon scientists Megan A. Morrissey, PhD, Srivatsan Raghavan, MD, PhD, and Jonathan Chou, MD, PhD, each of whom are exploring new therapeutic avenues for treating recalcitrant cancers such as pancreatic cancer.

Later in the afternoon, Catherine Sabatos-Peyton, PhD, Chief Executive Officer of Larkspur Biosciences, moderated a fireside chat among Jennifer Lauchte, MD, Global Head of Translational Oncology at Novartis, Alex R. Shoemaker, PhD, Executive Director of Oncology Discovery Research at AbbVie, and Louis Vermeulen, MD, PhD, Vice President of Discovery Oncology at Genentech about pathways to the development of breakthrough therapies.

Commenting on what makes for a fruitful collaboration, Dr. Lauchte said, "If you're meeting with just one person, you're not meeting with the right people. You should be interacting with those who are running the clinical trial, those that discovered the medicine — you should have that multi-disciplinary team with you sharing, sharing, sharing, so you're headed in the right direction."

Dr. Lie and Margaret Faul, PhD, Vice President of Drug Substance Technologies and Site Head of Amgen Massachusetts, closed the meeting and thanked guests for attending.

"We all benefit when academic researchers and their counterparts in industry are in conversation with one another," says Dr. Faul of the Accelerating Cancer Cures initiative. "Basic scientists, translational scientists, and clinicians all have particular insights that can inspire one another's research. Amgen is a leader in crossing disciplines to develop innovative new therapeutics for patients, and Accelerating Cancer Cures is just one of the ways we apply this strategy for the betterment of patients."

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