Genentech: Partners in the Fight Against Cancer

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October 22, 2019 By Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation

Since 2004, Genentech has made a transformational commitment to Damon Runyon of over $5.4 million to support the next generation of outstanding scientists. The company has sponsored the Damon Runyon Clinical Investigator Award since 2006 and was one of the founding partners of our Accelerating Cancer Cures initiative, a collaboration between Damon Runyon, pharmaceutical/biotech companies and academia. Nancy Valente, MD, Genentech's Senior Vice President of Product Development/Global Head, Hematology Development, and Genentech's Charitable Giving team, discuss the company's partnership with Damon Runyon.

Damon Runyon: Collaboration is frequently cited as crucial to scientific research, particularly when applied to a disease as complex as cancer. Describe how this partnership has strengthened your own work at Genentech, and what it means to you.

NV: One of our goals at Genentech is to become a partner of choice in the fight against cancer. For more than 20 years, we've been working to bring transformative medicines to people with cancer. As treating cancer becomes increasingly complex, we recognize that collaborating is an important step to discovering new breakthroughs and possibly a cure. As an industry, our efforts toward accelerating cures extend beyond our own walls; in fact, that is just where they begin. Whether it is working with other companies to develop and commercialize medicines, working with regulatory authorities to identify new endpoints or pathways to bring medicines to people faster or with patient organizations to support people with cancer, collaboration is critical to finding solutions that will improve patient outcomes.

DR: What is it about Damon Runyon that inspires you to continue to advocate for the Foundation and our scientists?

NV: For the years I've been an advisor to Damon Runyon, I've seen how many young researchers have gone to become leaders in the field and are behind some of the key discoveries in the fight against cancer. Some of these scientists have come to work at Genentech, and I've had a chance to see how we can further foster their ideas toward potentially the next breakthrough. I am humbled by the opportunity to support the future of science right now through Damon Runyon programs.

DR: Genentech has graciously hosted two of Damon Runyon's Accelerating Cancer Cures Symposia, where employees have had a chance to interact with Damon Runyon scientists. What do you see as the primary value of these meetings? What is the foundation's reputation among Genentech scientists?

NV: We are so honored to be part of the Damon Runyon symposia. It has been invaluable for our scientists to come together with peers and mentors in other areas of research to exchange ideas and identify more ways to collaborate. These collaborations are critical to accelerating the development of transformative therapies so, together, we can fundamentally change the way cancer is treated.

DR: What are some of the ways Genentech is exploring supporting early career scientists?

GCG: Our approach to giving is strategically aligned with our mission to advance science and positively impact the lives of people with serious diseases. We know that to realize tomorrow's breakthroughs, we must work to create an environment where scientific innovation can thrive - particularly to address the most pressing health challenges of our time. To do so, we support efforts to strengthen pathways for STEM careers for elementary-aged students all the way to early career scientists and have a renewed focus to ensure those pathways are open to people from all backgrounds.

DR: Having had the chance to get to know Damon Runyon during these first months (in your current position), what motivates you to continue this partnership?

GCG: Our medicines have treated nearly 21 million people worldwide with cancer. We want to help millions more with new and better medicines, but also fundamentally change the way people are treated. Funding of collaborative research throughout the scientific community can accelerate the pace of providing new medicines to patients quickly. As we've learned more about Damon Runyon in recent months, we've seen how our past support has helped provide training and resources to early career clinical investigators in the oncology field. We look forward to growing our partnership with Damon Runyon so we may continue contributing to the body of science that will drive further innovation in this field of medicine.

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