# Industry and Academic Researchers Gather for Innovative Accelerating Cancer Cures Research Symposium

The annual meeting is designed to encourage collaboration between cancer researchers in industry and their counterparts in academia.

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The Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation (Damon Runyon) held the eighth annual Accelerating Cancer Cures Research Symposium. The annual meeting is designed to encourage collaboration between cancer researchers in industry and their counterparts in academia in order to overcome many of the issues that currently impede progress against cancer. Hosted this year by Lilly Oncology, the meeting included academic researchers from top universities and research institutions as well as scientists from Genentech, Gilead Sciences, Merck, Novartis, Abbvie and Amgen.

Accelerating Cancer Cures is a unique collaboration between Damon Runyon, a prestigious cancer charity that supports pioneering early career cancer researchers, and leading biopharmaceutical companies. The goal of this multimillion-dollar initiative is to rebuild the ranks of specially trained physician-scientists who conduct both the innovative laboratory research necessary to identify new therapeutics and the clinical trials to bring these new treatments to patients. By collaborating on this initiative, the companies involved demonstrate their shared commitment to driving the next generation of breakthroughs in cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Thanks to unprecedented research advances over the past two decades, new treatments and earlier diagnosis have led to increased survival rates and improved quality of life, allowing cancer patients to spend more time with family and loved ones.

- The cancer death rate has fallen by 27% since its peak in 1991.
- Survival is increasing dramatically for many forms of cancer, with the average five-year survival rate for all types rising from 49% in 1975 to 69% in 2014.
- The five-year survival rate for patients with leukemia improved from 34% in the mid-1970s to 65% in the most recent time period.

- For children with cancer, the five-year relative survival rate increased from 58% in the mid-1970s to 83% today due to new and improved treatments.

However, challenges remain. This unique symposium brings together bold young physician-scientists to exchange ideas and push boundaries forward to accelerate the discovery of safer and more effective treatments.

Richard B. Gaynor, MD, President of Research and Development for Neon Therapeutics, Damon Runyon Board member, and Chair of the Accelerating Cancer Cures Advisory Committee, welcomed attendees and acknowledged the need to foster the next generation leaders in clinical cancer research. “The efforts of the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation and programs like Accelerating Cancer Cures are helping to make the hope of new cancer therapies a reality.”

Yung S. Lie, PhD, President and Chief Executive Officer of Damon Runyon, and Kimberly Blackwell, MD, Vice President, Early Phase Development and Immuno-oncology, Lilly Oncology, made opening remarks.

“Collaborations between industry and academia are critical to accelerating the development of transformative therapies for patients. We are confident that this will result in more breakthroughs that lead us toward cures,” Dr. Lie said. “Through Accelerating Cancer Cures and the Damon Runyon awards programs, we are ensuring that the best young physician-scientists continue to be the critical link between the research lab and the patients.”

Eli Lilly’s initial pledge of $15 million in 2000 launched the Damon Runyon Clinical Investigator Award, and its total investment of over $32 million has been critical to the success of the program. “Eli Lilly and Company is delighted and proud to partner with Damon Runyon in hosting the Accelerating Cancer Cures conference. The mission of Damon Runyon to find cancer cures through innovative science is consistent with the foundations of Lilly Oncology,” Dr. Blackwell said.

William G. Kaelin Jr., MD, Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator, Professor of Medicine at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Harvard Medical School, and Damon Runyon Board Member and Vice Chair of Scientific Programs, delivered a keynote address about new treatments for anemia, cancer and diseases caused by blocked arteries—major diseases affecting Americans.

Scientists from the nation’s leading research institutions, including Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Icahn School of Medicine Mount Sinai, Stanford University, Massachusetts General Hospital, The Ohio State University, and University of California, Berkeley, presented on a diverse range of promising research from novel microbiome strategies to improve cancer patient outcomes, to next-generation immunotherapies. Participants also took part in a spirited debate on the future of cancer research.

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