Blood Cancer Center Awards

WashU Medicine | Division of Oncology

Cultivating seeds of innovation

WashU Medicine's Division of Oncology Blood Cancer Center Awards provide critical seed funding to early-career scientists pursuing bold ideas in blood cancer research. These awards help generate the preliminary data needed to compete for major national grants, accelerating the development of new therapies and improving patient care. Each year, the blood cancer leadership group conducts a rigorous peer-review application process, with final awards approved by the division chief based on the most promising ideas with the greatest potential for impact. The number of awards is ultimately determined by the philanthropic support available– gifts to the Blood Cancer Center Fund make these awards possible. In 2025, 4 of 10 applications were selected.

2025 Awardees

Michael Slade, MD

Assistant Professor of Medicine, Leukemia and Bone Marrow Transplant

Project Title: Enabling Precision Medicine via Whole Genome Sequencing and Patient-Specific droplet digital PCR to Improve Risk Assessment in Multiple Myeloma

Description: In multiple myeloma, about half of patients have a genetic change called a translocation that helps drive the cancer. This project will test whether that change can be used as a molecular fingerprint to detect myeloma cells. Using bone marrow and blood samples, researchers aim to show that a personalized genetic test can detect the cancer—even at very low levels—laying the groundwork for more precise disease monitoring and treatment.

David Russler-Germain, MD, PhD

Instructor in Medicine, Division of Oncology

Project Title: Feasibility and performance of tumor only whole genome sequencing in DLBCL to accelerate personalized therapy

Description: In diffuse large B cell lymphoma (DLBCL), its aggressive nature means that treatment often needs to begin within days, leaving little time to perform the current generation of genetic tests that guide personalized care in other cancers. This project will test whether a new rapid whole genome sequencing method can be adapted to analyze DLBCL tumor samples quickly and accurately. Eventually, this will be used to test adding novel drugs to standard treatments for DLBCL to see if personalization is feasible and effective.

Felicia Gomez, PhD

Assistant Professor of Medicine, Division of Oncology

Project Title: Cellular Characterization of Hodgkin and Reed Sternberg Cells and the Tumor Microenvironment

Description: Hodgkin lymphoma (HL) comprises ~10% of lymphomas in the western world and often affects adolescents and young adults. Patients who are not cured with their initial treatment have a relatively poor prognosis. HL is unique in that the cancer cells make up less than 5% of the tumor. The rarity of the tumor cells makes the disease difficult to study. This project will use newly developed technologies to identify patterns of gene expression and alterations in tumor cell DNA. This data will facilitate new treatment options and tools for predicting the course of the disease.

Jeremy Baeten, PhD

Instructor, Division of Oncology

Project Title: Intersection of DNMT1 and DNA replication in TP53 mutant MDS/AML

Description: In myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) and acute myeloid leukemia (AML), patients with mutations in a gene called TP53 respond poorly to current therapies, and survival remains very limited. This project will study how a protein called DNMT1, which can affect DNA copying in cells, behaves differently in cancers with TP53 mutations. By testing how existing DNMT1-targeting drugs work in patient samples and cancer cell models, the research aims to uncover new drug combinations that more effectively target these high-risk cancers and improve patient outcomes.

Help propel the next bold idea in blood cancer care.

Make a gift today.

Siteman stands at the cusp of profound discovery. With the help of our community members and friends, we can advance farther and faster. On behalf of the many individuals who will benefit from your generosity, thank you.

Visit giving.wustl.edu/bloodcancercenter or use the QR code.

For more information, contact Radha Kimmel, Director of Advancement, at r.kimmel@wustl.edu or 314-935-4374.

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