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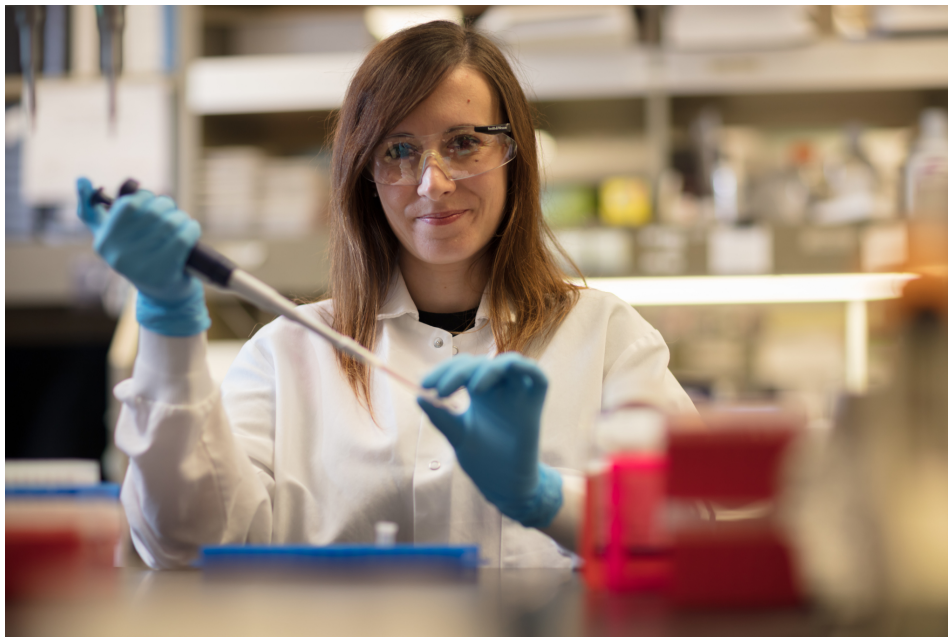
May 22, 2017

La Jolla Institute scientist receives grant from the Arthritis National Research Foundation

LA JOLLA, CA—The Arthritis National Research Foundation (ANRF) has awarded La Jolla Institute researcher Michela Locci, Ph.D., a \$100,000 research grant to study the underlying causes of rheumatoid arthritis.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks the lining of joints leading to stiffness, deformations and often crippling pain. The disease affects around 1.5 million adults in the United States and many of them fail to respond to currently available therapies.

The grants awarded by ANRF are specifically designed to bridge that gap and bring relieve to those patients who are not helped by available treatment regimes by providing “initial research funding to brilliant, investigative scientists with new ideas to cure arthritis and related autoimmune diseases.”



Michela Locci, Ph.D.

Locci, an instructor in the laboratory of LJI professor Shane Crotty, Ph.D., will use the ANRF funds to study a previously unexplored link between a highly specialized pool of immune cells and the presence of autoantibodies, which contribute to severe forms of the disease.

She will build on her expertise on the maturation of antibody-producing B cells, a process that is driven by follicular helper T cells, a rare and highly specialized type of T cells. Follicular helper T cells promote the proliferation of B cells that produce highly selective antibodies against pathogens while normally failing to support the maturation of those that generate antibodies directed against the body's own tissues or so called auto-antibodies.

Earlier studies have found excessive proliferation of follicular helper T cells in patients with rheumatoid arthritis, especially in patients producing auto-antibodies. In collaboration with researchers at UC San Diego, Locci will study patient samples to identify the factors responsible for the observed expansion of follicular helper T cells and their role in autoimmunity.

Understanding the signals that influence the pathogenic activation of follicular helper T cells could open the door to an entirely new class of medications that intercept the autoimmune response in rheumatoid arthritis and other autoimmune disorders.

About the La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology

The La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology is dedicated to understanding the intricacies and power of the immune system so that we may apply that knowledge to promote human health and prevent a wide range of human diseases. Since its founding in 1988 as an independent, nonprofit research organization, the Institute has made numerous advanced leading toward its goal: life without disease.

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