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For Immediate Release

Renowned immunologist Michael Croft honored as AAI Distinguished Fellow *Croft's research led to new approaches for treating harmful inflammation*

LA JOLLA, CA — La Jolla Institute for Immunology (LJI) Professor Emeritus Michael Croft, Ph.D., has been named a Distinguished Fellow of the American Association of Immunologists ([AAI](#)), one of the highest honors in the field of immune system research.

"To be recognized by AAI is a true honor," says Croft. "It's a privilege to join the scientists who have already been named AAI Distinguished Fellows. These are scientists I trained with and have looked up to."

For Croft, being named an AAI fellow holds a special, personal meaning. As a fellow, Croft now shares the same distinction as researchers Susan L. Swain, Ph.D., and Richard W. Dutton, Ph.D., two immunologists who mentored Croft at UC San Diego in the 1980s. "They were my primary mentors and had a great influence on my career," says Croft.

Croft is also proud to share the honor with LJI faculty members Hilde Cheroutre, Ph.D., Mitchell Kronenberg, Ph.D., and Anjana Rao, Ph.D., who were named AAI Distinguished Fellows in previous years. "They have all made outstanding contributions to immunology research and are people I've admired greatly," says Croft.

Croft changed our understanding of T cells

In his 29 years on the LJI faculty, Croft demonstrated how fundamental research can lead to potentially life-changing treatments and therapies. His lab discovered how specific immune system molecules can trigger dangerous inflammation and fuel conditions such as allergic asthma and atopic dermatitis (the most common form of eczema).

Among his many findings, Croft revealed the importance of a TNF molecule called OX40, and its binding partner, OX40L. Croft went on to propose that blocking OX40 activity may help treat harmful inflammation.

Scientists at Kyowa Kirin, a longtime research partner of LJI, understood the importance of Croft's proposal. They worked closely with Croft as they undertook an antibody discovery program. This

resulted in an antibody, KHK4083, now termed rocatinlimab, an investigational T cell rebalancing therapy that targets the OX40 receptor expressed on the surface of pathogenic T cells.

Rocatinlimab has recently demonstrated positive phase 3 study results evaluating its safety and efficacy in adults and adolescents with moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis.

Serving the scientific community

According to AAI, the honor of Distinguished Fellow "is bestowed by AAI to recognize members for distinguished careers and outstanding scientific contributions as well as their service to AAI and the immunology community."

Serving the immunology community has always been a priority for Croft. He served as director of academic affairs at LJI for seven years, while mentoring countless early career researchers and strengthening important collaborations across academia and industry. He also led immunology courses for AAI and chaired prominent AAI symposia.

Even in retirement, Croft continues to meet with early career scientists at LJI. "I want to pass along the mentorship I received," says Croft. "That's an important thing for me—and something we should all do."

Croft will officially be addressed as a Distinguished Fellow at IMMUNOLOGY2026™, the 109th meeting of AAI, held between Apr. 15 and 19 in Boston, MA.

Learn more:

[A place in immunology history: After 29 years, Dr. Michael Croft will retire from the LJI faculty](#)

[Architects of fundamental science: LJI discoveries have led to an investigational therapy that aims to bring relief to patients with atopic dermatitis](#)

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