Through its overall Grants & Awards program and its Women Who Conquer Cancer (WWCC) initiative, Conquer Cancer, the ASCO Foundation, has invested more than $57 million to support women oncologists and researchers around the world. Meet some of the investigators whose studies have been supported by Conquer Cancer donors.
Naomi J. Winick, MD

Pediatric Cancer

Research: Dr. Winick has spent more than 40 years working to provide better care for children with cancer since receiving a Young Investigator Award (YIA) grant to launch her studies in pediatric research. Dr. Winick’s research ranges from developing new therapies to better understanding bereavement. Her work has been featured in more than 1,110 publications.

Impact: More children are surviving cancer. Dr. Winick’s recent work in the Children’s Oncology Group was highlighted in ASCO’s 2020 Clinical Cancer Advances report. She was among the leaders of a clinical trial for patients with T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) that established the superiority of escalating-dose methotrexate with asparaginase and nelarabine versus high-dose methotrexate without nelarabine. The trial showed the best outcomes ever reported for children and adolescents with T-cell ALL: a 5-year disease-free survival rate of 91.5% and overall survival rate of 93.7%.

Yanin Chávarri-Guerra, MD, MSc

Breast Cancer

Research: Mexican women with breast cancer present at more advanced stages than those in high-resource countries, due to delays in diagnosis and limited access to information. Dr. Chávarri-Guerra used funding from an International Innovation Grant (IIG) to support a breast health educational program that uses intergenerational learning to increase breast cancer awareness. The program’s intent: transform young girls into health promoters within their households and communities to raise breast cancer awareness.

Impact: The program significantly increased students’ knowledge on breast cancer and promoted intergenerational transmission of that knowledge to their female relatives. Students and teachers who attended the program considered it culturally acceptable and age-appropriate and believe it should be included in the middle school curriculum (Oncologist. 2017;22:1249-56). Results also support the concept of intergenerational transmission of knowledge as an innovative tool in cancer education, prevention, and early detection. Dr. Chávarri-Guerra is implementing an online educational patient navigation program curriculum for health care workers.

“The IIG was the first academic and large prospective research study that I personally led. Receiving the grant has allowed me to lay the foundation for future research in breast cancer disparities, to build connections with national and international researchers, and to plan ahead for new research projects,” Dr. Chávarri-Guerra said. “As a woman in research living in a low- and middle-income country it is very hard to obtain cancer research financing and I feel so fortunate and grateful to have a second IIG to advance cancer care in my country. Having ASCO and Conquer Cancer’s support during the last years has been crucial in my career as an oncologist and cancer researcher.”
Jessica Hawley, MD
Prostate Cancer

Research: Dr. Hawley’s WWCC YIA–funded research is focused on a phase II clinical trial aimed to improve clinical outcomes for patients with prostate cancer by combining standard-of-care therapies, androgen deprivation therapy (ADT) and chemotherapy, with immunotherapy. She also plans to finalize projects she began as a fellow to expand the understanding about how environmental factors and tumor-immune biology intersect to drive differential outcomes in genitourinary malignancies.

Impact: Early data shows some promising results, which Dr. Hawley expects will lead to new combination therapies and potential new drug targets to treat advanced prostate cancer. Dr. Hawley believes her discoveries will also help patients with kidney and bladder cancer.

“Being selected for a peer-reviewed research grant early in one’s career is an important first step in establishing a track record of funding,” said Dr. Hawley. “I’m grateful to the donors for investing in the research today, and the research I’ll be doing over the length of my career.”

Sarita Ghimire, MD
Cervical Cancer

Research: With support from an IIG, Dr. Ghimire researches the efficacy of mobile health technologies to improve screening and care for patients with cervical cancer in the Kailali District of Nepal.

Impact: Dr. Ghimire’s work contributes to increased efficacy of the cervical cancer screening and treatment program for patients in rural areas. Her innovative approach has since been integrated into national screening guidelines and referral policy and practice to help improve health outcomes for patients.
**Sandra D’Angelo, MD**

**Sarcoma**

**Research:** Dr. D’Angelo’s work focuses on the development of novel immunotherapy approaches for patients with rare malignancies, such as soft tissue and bone sarcomas. A YIA and a CDA enabled Dr. D’Angelo to launch the first combination immunotherapy clinical trial for patients with sarcoma.

**Impact:** Dr. D’Angelo’s funded research led to a groundbreaking clinical trial that provided patients access to a new and promising combination immunotherapy approach. Conquer Cancer’s support also provided Dr. D’Angelo with the protected research time to pursue these ideas that led to important breakthroughs in the sarcoma and rare cancer spaces.

**Bahar Laderian, MD**

**Rare Tumors**

**Research:** Dr. Laderian is researching ways to better understand and treat rare tumors, particularly paragangliomas and pheochromocytomas. A YIA launched her work exploring why succinate dehydrogenase (SDH) gene mutation gives rise to paragangliomas and pheochromocytomas in the adrenal medulla but not in the adrenal cortex.

**Impact:** Dr. Laderian is still analyzing data, but reports “interesting and monumental results.” The study is already bringing hope to patients. “When patients come to me, they are so happy I know about their disease. Paragangliomas and pheochromocytomas are rare and can be vicious. There are not enough FDA-approved therapies for these patients, and that can be scary,” she said. “We still need more treatment options available for patients.”

**Elysia Alvarez, MD, MPH**

**Adolescent and Young Adult Cancers**

**Research:** Dr. Alvarez conducts surveys and interviews with oncologists and hematologists, nurses, social workers, and others who participate in the care of adolescent and young adult (AYA) patients with cancer across Latin America to better understand the factors that impact the care of AYA patients, including where they are treated and access to treatment. She is a GO YIA and WWCC Career Development Award (CDA) recipient.

**Impact:** Dr. Alvarez found significant overlap in the challenges AYA patients experience in Latin American countries, from financial hardships to hospital age restrictions and limited age-appropriate care resources. Next steps in Dr. Alvarez’s research focus on interviewing AYA cancer survivors to explore their experiences with cancer care, address barriers to treatment, and improve access to cancer care. She and her team are working to build a clearer set of adapted guidelines and clinical models to help AYA patients receive the best care possible in Latin America.