SWISS BRIDGE

INVEST IN CANCER RESEARCH WORLDWIDE

PRESS RELEASE

11th SWISS BRIDGE AWARD: Honouring three outstanding cancer researchers

Zurich, 26 October 2010 – The SWISS BRIDGE AWARD of 500,000 Swiss francs will be presented today in Zurich recognizing three young, ambitious cancer researchers. The award winners are: Andrea Alimonti, M.D., Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI), Bellinzona, Ronit Satchi-Fainaro, Ph.D., Sackler School of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Israel, and Anna Sablina, Ph.D., VIB Research Institute, K.U.Leuven, Belgium.

For over ten years, SWISS BRIDGE has been supporting scientists, whose work promises major advancements in cancer research and in the fight against the disease. Today, the 11th SWISS BRIDGE AWARD will be presented in Zurich. The total award sum of 500,000 Swiss francs will be awarded to three cancer researchers from Switzerland, Israel and Belgium:

- **Andrea Alimonti, M.D.** of the Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI), Bellinzona: 250,000 Swiss francs;
- **Ronit Satchi-Fainaro, Ph.D.** of the Sackler School of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Israel: 125,000 Swiss francs;
- **Anna Sablina, Ph.D.** of the Research Institute VIB, University Leuven, Belgium: 125,000 Swiss francs.

Rewarding cancer research by early career scientists

This year's award is dedicated to promoting cancer researchers, who stand at the beginning of their career. With the 11th SWISS BRIDGE AWARD, junior researchers who aim to transform the way we fight cancer are recognized: They are promising basic researchers, who are currently establishing a team at their institute or have recently become team leaders.

Over 60 researchers responded to the call for applications by submitting a short project description. These applications were evaluated by an international scientific committee under the operative lead of the Scientific Office of the Swiss Cancer League. Six researchers were invited to submit a detailed project description and finally, three projects were nominated for the award. The president of the Scientific Committee, Professor Gordon McVie of the European Institute of Oncology in Milan, will present the award to the three winners, who will use the funding for the realisation of their innovative research projects.

About the SWISS BRIDGE Foundation

SWISS BRIDGE was founded on the initiative of the former managing director Thomas Hoepli, who is now a member of the Board of Foundation. The purpose of the organisation, founded in 1997 with assistance of the Swiss Cancer League, is to financially support high-quality Swiss and international research projects, which are expected to deliver new findings in the fight against cancer, through contributions from private donors and foundations like the Stammbach Foundation in Basel. To date, a total of 6.35 million Swiss francs has been conferred by the SWISS BRIDGE AWARD for cancer research projects of scientists based in Belgium, England, France, Israel, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Switzerland.

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Summaries of the three supported research projects

Andrea Alimonti, M.D., Laboratory of Experimental Oncology, Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI), Bellinzona, receives 250,000 Swiss francs for the project entitled:

Manipulation of senescence pathways for cancer therapy: from experimental models to clinic
Various studies demonstrate the relevance of cellular biological aging in restricting the development of new tumour cells and thus open up new potential for opportunities in cancer treatment. Andrea Alimonti and his team examine a certain form of the biological aging known as PICS (PTEN loss induced cellular senescence): The ability to induce biological aging in cells by targeting PTEN signalling (via deactivation of the tumour suppressor PTEN), without a requirement for hyper replication and DNA damage, opens up the possibility of targeting quiescent cells including quiescent cancer initiating cells. This offers a new therapeutic approach especially to target prostate cancer cells. If it is possible to activate PICS cellular senescence through drugs and bioactive compounds in prostate cells, then dormant cancer cells could also be inactivated. Alimonti's research team has tested various compounds in the laboratory in order to find out if and to what degree PICS cell aging can be activated. Such a compound could eventually lead to a new anticancer drug to treat prostate cancer.

Ronit Satchi-Fainaro, Ph.D., Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, Sackler School of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Israel, receives 125 000 Swiss francs for the project entitled:

Deciphering the molecular mechanism of tumour dormancy using bone-targeted polymer therapeutics
Before tumours spread, they remain dormant and microscopic and do not expand over prolonged periods of time. Once a tumour is fed with nutrients and oxygen by newly built blood vessels, it can grow and develop metastases. The ability of a tumour to progress from a dormant to a fast-growing state is central to the progression of cancer and is termed the «angiogenic switch». Not much is known on the inactive phase of tumours and this angiogenic switch. Ronit Satchi-Fainaro and her team investigate the molecular and genetic changes that trigger inactive tumours via the angiogenic switch to become growing and spreading tumours. Satchi-Fainaro's research group has tested various anticancer or anti-angiogenic used in the treatment of bone tumours and bone metastases. The researchers will evaluate the ability of these compounds to delay the angiogenic switch to keep dormant tumours inactive for longer periods of time or, alternatively, to regress fast-growing angiogenic tumours to a dormant state.

Dr. Anna Sablina, VIB Department of Molecular and Developmental Genetics, University of Leuven, Belgium, receives 125,000 Swiss francs for the project entitled:

The role of the RalA signalling pathway in human cancer
The RAS gene family plays an essential role in the formation of many tumours. Mutations in these genes lead to the activation of cell growth and cell division, leading to cancer cell development. Oncogenic mutations of RAS family members have been identified in up to 30% of human cancers. Many cancer therapies work insufficiently or not at all for patients with RAS-mutated tumours. Thus, there is pressing clinical need for new therapies specifically for patients with RAS-mutated tumours and this is the motivation for Anna Sablina and her research team. They want to find out how the enzyme RalA GTPase influences cancer development as a result of an RAS-mediated tumourigenesis. Compounds that activate or switch off the RalA GPTase are being sought after in the laboratory. With their work, the researchers hope they can identify novel molecular targets for cancer therapies effective in the treatment of patients with RAS-mutated tumours.