Hanlons re-up commitment to fighting rare mutation

Longtime Dana-Farber supporter Kevin Hanlon knows a thing or two about determination. Whether he be preparing for a charity run, the Pan-Mass Challenge, or traversing dozens of 4,000-foot-high peaks with his family, he is not one to give up. When faced with a diagnosis of lung cancer with an uncommon mutation, Hanlon applied the same determination to finding a cure, creating the Denise and Kevin Hanlon Family Fund for Lung Cancer Research at Dana-Farber.

Recently, Kevin and his wife, Denise, pledged an additional gift of $250,000 to the fund, managed under the direction of Pasi Jänne, MD, PhD, director of the Carole M. and Philip L. Lowe Center for Thoracic Oncology.

The Hanlons hope that their gift brings more attention to the importance of investing in cures for diseases caused by rare mutations. “We’re interested in fostering more awareness of less common types of lung cancer while bolstering the treatment options,” Kevin Hanlon said. In addition to supporting research, Kevin and other patients are organizing to push broadly for more funding to investigate exon 20 and other mutations. “The EGF exon 20 mutation had no medicines to combat it two years, ago and now there are more options for patients,” he added. “We hope to see more progress.”

“Rare mutations don’t get as much research funding as more common anomalies but the needs of patients are just as important,” Jänne said. “Mr. Hanlon’s commitment will help my group to develop targeted treatments.”

Pan-Mass Challenge presents record-breaking $51 million

In November 2017, the Pan-Mass Challenge (PMC) presented a ceremonial check for an astounding $51 million to Dana-Farber and the Jimmy Fund, representing 100 percent of each dollar raised by more than 6,200 dedicated riders of the 38th PMC in August 2017. This was another record-breaking total, exceeding the 2017 goal of $48 million and raising $4 million more than the previous year. Since 1980, the PMC has raised over $598 million for Dana-Farber. This remarkable accomplishment would not have been possible without the committed support of presenting sponsors Red Sox Foundation and New Balance, media partner WBZ-TV, 200 additional sponsors, and over 4,000 dedicated volunteers. From left, at the presentation: New Balance CEO and President Rob DeMartini; WBZ-TV anchor Lisa Hughes; PMC Director of Stewardship Meredith Beaton-Star; PMC Chairman of the Board David Fialkow; PMC Founder and Executive Director and Dana-Farber Trustee Billy Starr; Dana-Farber President and CEO Laurie H. Glimcher, MD; Dana-Farber Board of Trustees Chairman and PMC Board member Josh Bekenstein; Chairman of the Jimmy Fund and Dana-Farber Trustee Larry Lucchino; and WBZ-TV, myTV38, and CBSBoston.com President and General Manager Mark Lund.

Schussel gift helps Dana-Farber scientists explore new territory

Both Sandi and George Schussel believe that knowledge is power, and, with more knowledge, the end of cancer is inevitable. When Sandi was diagnosed with angioimmunoblastic T-cell lymphoma (AITL) and began treatment at Dana-Farber with oncologist Matthew Davids, MD, MMSc, she and her family learned that the genetic drivers of her rare blood cancer were not known.

In response, the Schussels made a new gift of $100,000 to the previously established Sandra and George Schussel Family Fund at Dana-Farber to research the drivers of T-cell lymphomas, including AITL. The fund will be managed under the direction of David Weinstock, MD, whose lab focuses on T-cell lymphomas. “As a nurse, I am very interested not only in advancing discoveries, but also in encouraging the sharing of information within the research community,” Sandi said. Their gift is already having a significant impact. With support from the Schussels, an instructor in Weinstock’s lab, Samuel Ng, MD, PhD, created the first cell line for this disease.

“This cell line will allow us to determine which genes AITL depends on for survival and to find drugs that specifically kill it,” Weinstock said. “The Schussels’ gift has helped us make a completely unique resource for the whole lymphoma research community.”

George shares this commitment to increasing knowledge of this “orphan” disease: “The more we know about what we’re battling, the easier we can find cancer’s weak point, and we can treat it with agents less injurious to patients.”

PCRF grant drives advances in pediatric sarcoma research

Committed to fighting for a cancer-free future for children, the Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation (PCRF) has funded promising scientific research since 1982. Through its grants, PCRF seeks to improve the care, quality of life, and survival rates of pediatric cancer patients.

Since 2013, PCRF has supported the research of Dana-Farber’s Brian Crompton, MD, who focuses on new treatment approaches for patients with aggressive pediatric sarcomas. High-grade sarcomas in children are often resistant even to intensive chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation. The cure rate of less than 75 percent has remained static for several years.

“There are two major challenges that need to be overcome to improve our treatment approaches for pediatric cancer: we need better drugs and we need to be able to predict which patients need these new treatments,” said Crompton.

“Funding from the Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation has helped us test new candidate treatment approaches in the laboratory and make exciting progress developing non-invasive blood tests to identify patients at risk of treatment resistance.”

“PCRF is proud to support Dr. Brian Crompton’s research seeking new treatment approaches for children with high-grade sarcomas.”

— JERI WILSON, PCRF Executive Director

Sandi and George Schussel (right) support the research of Samuel Ng, MD, PhD (left), and David Weinstock, MD, into the drivers of T-cell lymphomas.