

Lupus Research Alliance Announces Recipients of 2024 Diversity in Lupus Research Awards

The Lupus Research Alliance announces the recipients of the 2024 Career Development and Postdoctoral Awards to Promote Diversity in Lupus Research.

NEW, NY, UNITED STATES, September 24, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Lupus Research Alliance](#) (LRA) is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2024 Career Development and Postdoctoral Awards to Promote [Diversity in Lupus Research](#). Launched in 2021, the Diversity in Lupus Research (DLR) Awards aim to foster the development and productivity of exceptional early-career and postdoctoral scientists from underrepresented minority groups in science.



By supporting these outstanding individuals, we are broadening the diversity of our scientific community and paving the way for innovative approaches to drive advancements in lupus research”

Teodora Staeva, PhD

Lupus is a debilitating autoimmune disease that disproportionately affects Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and Asian/Pacific Islander people. The LRA inaugurated the DLR Awards three years ago to foster a diverse scientific

community that mirrors the populations most impacted by lupus.

“We are delighted to recognize the talented recipients of the 2024 LRA Diversity in Lupus Research Awards,” said Teodora Staeva, Ph.D., LRA Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer. “By supporting these outstanding individuals, we are not only broadening the diversity of our scientific community, but also paving the way for innovative approaches to drive advancements in lupus research.”

This year, three individuals will be awarded the DLR Career Development Award, which provides each investigator up to \$600,000 over four years to help establish a competitive research program. The recipients are:

Carlos Castrillon, Ph.D., Emory University

Paul Hoover, M.D., Ph.D., Brigham and Women’s Hospital

Renita Horton, Ph.D., University of Houston

Additionally, two postdoctoral fellows will receive the DLR Postdoctoral Award, which provides

each fellow up to \$170,000 over two years to support their transition to independent research roles. The recipients are:

Rodrigo Cervantes-Díaz, Ph.D., Boston Children's Hospital

Jonathan Lagos Orellana, M.D., Ph.D., Seattle Children's Hospital

WHAT AWARD RECIPIENTS AIM TO DISCOVER

Career Development Award to Promote Diversity in Lupus Research:

Carlos Castrillon, Ph.D., Emory University

B cells are immune cells that produce antibodies to identify and mark for destruction foreign invaders such as bacteria and viruses. B cells sense these invaders using their surface receptors, which then instruct B cells to activate. This process is kept in check by signaling inhibitors, which act like brakes to prevent B cells from overreacting. In lupus, these brakes are often less effective, and B cells are overly responsive. Dr. Castrillon aims to understand how these signaling inhibitors are controlled in lupus and explore whether restoring their effectiveness can help normalize B cell activity.

Paul Hoover, M.D., Ph.D., Brigham and Women's Hospital

Lupus nephritis is a severe kidney disease affecting many people with lupus and often leads to kidney failure. Dr. Hoover helped discover a type of immune cell in the kidneys of people with lupus nephritis and mouse models called injury-associated monocytes, which are linked to severe disease. He will use cutting-edge technology to study how systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) risk genes impact these cells and identify new therapies targeting them.

Renita Horton, Ph.D., University of Houston

Expectant mothers with certain lupus-related autoantibodies (antibodies that mistakenly target the body's own cells and tissues) are at a higher risk of having babies with congenital heart block, a serious heart condition. Dr. Horton developed a novel model called the congenital cardiac fibrosis chip to identify key factors that contribute to cardiac fibrosis (the formation of scar tissue) and heart disease in newborns. Her research aims to find biomarkers and therapeutic targets in order to treat or prevent fibrosis associated with neonatal (newborn) lupus.

Postdoctoral Award to Promote Diversity in Lupus Research:

Rodrigo Cervantes-Díaz, Ph.D., Boston Children's Hospital

B cells, which play a key role in the development of lupus, are activated (turned on) by certain innate signals. Dr. Cervantes-Díaz, will study how B cells respond to these signals in healthy people and those with lupus, tracking changes over time to understand how they go off course. He will also examine the impact of genetic variants (mutations) linked to lupus on B cell behavior so that targeted treatments can be developed.

Jonathan Lagos Orellana, M.D., Ph.D., Seattle Children's Hospital

The role of B cells extends beyond antibody production. B cells also present small pieces of pathogens (foreign invaders) to other immune cells (in a process called antigen presentation), triggering an immune response. Antigen presentation may go awry in lupus. Dr. Lagos Orellana will explore how changes in antigen processing are related to the activation of self-reactive B cells (B cells that produce autoantibodies) in lupus in order to identify new therapeutic targets.

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