

Vanessa Morales-Tirado Recognized by Influential Women 2025

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-- Influential Women is proud to announce that Vanessa Morales-Tirado, PhD, will be honored as one of its featured honorees for 2025. Vanessa Morales-Tirado, PhD, is an enthusiastic and driven immunologist with over 15 years of experience spanning academic and pharmaceutical research. She currently serves as a Principal Research Scientist at AbbVie Bioresearch Center, where she focuses on dermatological diseases, applying her immunology expertise to drug discovery, mechanistic studies, and translational research for small molecules and multispecifics. In addition to her research, Vanessa leads scientific and technical external partnerships in dermatology, leveraging her combined industry and academic experience to support strategic collaborations and specimen procurement for pre-clinical and translational studies.



Born and raised in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, Vanessa is the first in her family to earn a doctoral degree. Passionate about equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EED&I), she has championed safe and supportive environments in the workplace, co-leading AbbVie's Hispanic/Latino ERG chapter and initiatives to promote recognition and advancement of underrepresented minorities. She inspires her colleagues to be authentic, resilient, and to be the best they can be.

Vanessa completed a M.S. degree in Virology and Vaccine Development under the supervision of Dr. Robert Rose, a pioneer in using virus-like particles in vaccine development, at the University of Rochester School of Medicine. She continued her graduate studies and completed a M.S./Ph.D. Program in Immunology with strong emphasis in primary immunodeficiencies under the mentorship of Dr. Deborah Fowell, a leader in spatiotemporal regulation of T cell immunity

at tissue sites of infection and inflammation. Her Ph.D. research on the Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome protein (WASp) revealed critical mechanisms in T cell polarization and Th2 differentiation. Her graduate work took her to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where she completed two fellowships: first, in Human Immunology, and secondly, in Bone Marrow Transplantation and Cellular Therapy, in Dr. Janice Riberdy's and Dr. Asha Pillai's Labs, respectively. Her postdoctoral work at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital provided a unique opportunity to do research and to develop novel treatment options for pediatric immunodeficiencies and malignancies. At St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Vanessa made key discoveries in regulatory T cell biology and immune modulation.

Vanessa transitioned into a faculty position at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis, leading the Ocular Immunology and Oncology Translational Research Unit. Her laboratory focused on Ocular Melanoma and Retinoblastoma, covering the two most common intraocular malignancies in adults and children, respectively. She focused on immunomodulation of the tumor microenvironment for the identification of novel drug targets and was part of the team of investigators in several Clinical Studies. Vanessa's academic career was very fruitful, producing over 25 peer-reviewed publications, a patent, and presenting at national and international conferences.

After a career in Academia, Vanessa transitioned to AbbVie over seven years ago. Vanessa and her team apply their immunology background for the expansion of the Discovery Dermatology portfolio to understand the pathobiology of dermatological diseases, including Atopic Dermatitis and Hidradenitis Suppurativa, to generate transformative therapies. She leads internal initiatives and participates actively in external collaborations. Here, she combines her love for research, mentoring, and her passion for helping improve people's quality of life.

Learn More about Vanessa Morales-Tirado:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/vanessa-morales-tirado>

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