

September 19, 2013

The Honorable Richard Durbin  
Chairman  
Defense Appropriations Subcommittee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Defense Appropriations Subcommittee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Cochran:

The undersigned organizations representing the colorectal cancer stakeholder community thank you for supporting the Department of Defense's (DoD) medical research efforts. **Specifically, we appreciate the inclusion of \$25 million for the Peer Reviewed Cancer Research Program (PRCRP) in the FY 2014 DoD spending bill.**

The PRCRP was established in FY 2009 to support research into specifically designated cancers with relevance to military service members and their families. According to a study published in the June 2009 issue of *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, colorectal cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer among active duty military personnel. Colorectal cancer was first included in the PRCRP in FY 2010. Because colorectal cancer research has benefitted from PRCRP funds, we are disappointed that the Senate Committee Report (113-085) omits colorectal cancer under the PRCRP. The House DoD FY 2014 spending bill continues to include colorectal cancer as a PRCRP-funded cancer. **We therefore ask that during the course of negotiations, you commit to maintaining colorectal cancer as eligible for research funding under the PRCRP.**

As you know, a hallmark of the PRCRP is its focus on innovative research in cancers, including colorectal cancer, through the support of exceptionally talented, early-career researchers and clinicians who have the potential to advance the field of cancer research and deliver breakthroughs in the prevention, detection, and treatment of cancer. We offer the following testimonial on the value of PRCRP-funded research:

*"Funding I received from the FY 2010 Peer Reviewed Cancer Research Program helped me to identify two new molecular targets which could lead to new treatments for patients with colorectal cancer; in addition, our findings suggest that endothelial cells that comprise tumor-blood vessels are not merely conduits for nutrients and oxygen, but are also actively involved in regulating cancer stem cells – the drivers of tumor growth, chemoresistance, and as identified from our studies, metastasis formation. This is a highly original finding, which has been validated in innumerable experiments in my laboratory, and resulted in one of the most important papers I've published."*

- Lee M. Ellis, MD, MD Anderson Cancer Center.<sup>1</sup>

The demand for research funding through the PRCRP has been strong:<sup>2</sup>

- FY 2010 – 472 applications for PRCRP funding, of which 101 were for colorectal cancer research. Four colorectal cancer grants were funded for total of just under \$2 million.

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<sup>1</sup> Lu et al., Endothelial Cells Promote the Colorectal Cancer Stem Cell Phenotype through a Soluble Form of Jagged-1, *Cancer Cell* (2013), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ccr.2012.12.021>; Cited in <http://www.nature.com/ncb/journal/v15/n4/full/ncb2734.html#auth-1> Zaromytidou, A jagged road to cancer stem cells, *Nature Cell Biology* (2013)

<sup>2</sup> The number of applications is a reflection of the type of award mechanisms available for funding during a given year.

- FY 2011 – 845 applications for PRCRP funding, of which 135 were for colorectal cancer research. Four colorectal cancer grants funded for total of \$1.3 million.
- FY 2012 – 163 applications, of which 40 were for colorectal cancer research. Eight colorectal cancer grants were funded for a total of \$2.9 million.

A funding level of \$25 million for the PRCRP, as included in the Senate DoD spending bill, will go a long way toward funding cutting-edge medical research.

The PRCRP Integration Panel, in an effort to stretch financial resources, has focused largely on small development awards which help develop young scientists and may provide building blocks of knowledge about cancer. Fight Colorectal Cancer's Board Chair Nancy Roach is a member of the PRCRP Integration Panel and has worked hard with her colleagues to identify specific focus areas for PRCRP research, keeping with the requirement that the research demonstrate military relevance. In addition to the small Career Development Award in 2013, the PRCRP Idea Program will award funding for high-risk, high-reward research. To receive an Idea Program award, research applicants are now required to address at least one of the following military focus areas:

- Susceptibility to developing cancers due to exposure to militarily relevant environmental or chemical carcinogens (including transgenerational effects);
- Identification of predictive and prognostic biomarkers of developing cancers due to exposure to militarily relevant environmental or chemical carcinogens;
- Molecular mechanisms by which environmental influences associated with military exposures alter gene structure, stability, and expression; and
- Examination of cancer diagnosis and prognosis effects on the psychosocial well-being of military beneficiaries.

We believe directing funding to research that addresses one of these four areas maintains the goal of the PRCRP. We ask for your help to ensure that colorectal cancer researchers have the continued ability to compete for funds under these guidelines.

Our organizations offer our assistance to you in advancing an FY 2014 DoD spending bill with robust funding for the PRCRP and other Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs. We appreciate your acknowledgement of the value these programs lend to the health of our country's military service members and their families, as well as the broader American public.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Camille Bonta at 202-320-3658 or [cbonta@summithealthconsulting.com](mailto:cbonta@summithealthconsulting.com).

Sincerely,

American College of Gastroenterology  
 American Gastroenterological Association  
 American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy  
 Colon Cancer Alliance  
 Digestive Disease National Coalition  
 Fight Colorectal Cancer  
 International Society of Gastrointestinal Oncology  
 Preventing Colorectal Cancer  
 Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates