St. Jude/PIDS Transplant and Research Conference 2018: Two Decades of Science and Career Development

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The global burden of pediatric infectious diseases (PIDs) remains substantial. Vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, influenza, rotavirus, and pertussis continue to afflict children across the world. Respiratory viral infections and infectious diarrhea abound in the developing world, as do tuberculosis and human immunodeficiency virus. In addition, antimicrobial resistance and emerging pathogens, such as Zika and Ebola viruses, have shown us convincingly that microbes respect neither borders nor oceans. Although great strides have been made in the prevention of certain infectious diseases, opportunities to do more are easily appreciated.

Despite these opportunities, the number of young physicians who enter infectious diseases training, and those who are likely to engage in research to conquer the current challenges, is highly variable from year to year. In 2014, 34 applicants entered the national residency match program (the Match) to pursue training in PIDs, far short of the 66 positions offered by US training programs. The internal medicine/infectious diseases field experienced similar results that year; 51% of the 128 US infectious diseases programs remained unfilled after the Match. The factors that influence the decision to pursue subspecialty training remain unclear, but more than one-third of trainees make the decision to pursue such training before residency. Therefore, early exposure to the career opportunities and rewards for potential PID trainees is critical as we prepare to meet the workforce gaps in this important field.

The Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS), established in 1978, is the world’s largest organization of professionals dedicated to the treatment, control, and eradication of infectious diseases that affect children. The PIDS is deeply engaged in the recruitment and training of future leaders in PIDs. One way in which these goals are accomplished is through the jointly sponsored St Jude/PIDS Research Conference, held each spring at the St Jude Medical Center in Memphis, Tennessee. The goals of this conference are to disseminate new knowledge in PIDs and to foster the professional development of medical students, graduate students, pediatric residents, and fellows as physician-scientists and clinicians.

The St Jude/PIDS research conference is now in its 18th year and has a steadily growing attendance of more than 200 faculty and trainees. The 2-day conference is composed of lectures from field-leading scientists in infectious diseases, immunology, and microbiology; small-group sessions focused on career development, grantsmanship, and leadership; and opportunities for trainees and junior faculty to present original research through oral abstracts and poster presentations. As the only PID research conference in the United States, the St Jude/PIDS research conference fosters collaboration among and opportunities for mentoring from scientists and physicians across the country.

The St Jude/PIDS Pediatric Transplant ID Symposium, initiated in 2014, is a 1-day symposium for physicians and physicians-in-training who provide care for pediatric transplant recipients and other immunocompromised children. The presentations at this 1-day meeting highlight the advances and controversies in this field. Subjects include the diagnosis and management of opportunistic infections and other complications associated with pediatric solid organ and hematopoietic stem cell transplantation through lectures, poster sessions, and interactive breakout sessions. World leaders in transplant infectious diseases and immunology present cutting edge research in areas including the immunology of transplantation and rejection; advances in prophylaxis against and treatment of important viral, bacterial, and fungal pathogens; new immunosuppressive agents and chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapies; and graft-versus-host disease.

In this supplement to the Journal of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, we provide a summary of the 2018 St Jude/PIDS research conference and pediatric transplant infectious diseases symposium. Review articles by selected lecturers and plenary speakers are provided by the presenters; the range of topics—from vaccine safety to viral pathogenesis—highlights both the scope of presentations at the meeting and the diversity within our field. In addition, original research abstracts presented at the meeting are provided.

We encourage you to join us in Memphis for the next St. Jude/PIDS Research Conference on March 7–9, 2019; registration information is available at the PIDS website (https://www.pids.org/). We believe you will find the conference a fantastic opportunity to learn about and contribute to the PIDS mission.