

For Immediate Release

# SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY FOUNDATION

## Spinal Muscular Atrophy Foundation Commits Up To \$1 Million for Young Investigator Awards

*Foundation Seeks Researchers to Further Study Genetic Disease Impacting Infants*

**New York, NY – May 25, 2004** – The Spinal Muscular Atrophy Foundation, in partnership with the American Academy of Neurology Foundation, today announced that they are seeking grant applications from investigators working on innovative spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) research projects. The Foundations will provide up to \$1 million in research grants through their Young Investigator Awards initiative, a program to encourage and facilitate research by emerging young stars. The value of each individual grant is more than \$350,000. The initiative is designed to accelerate progress towards a cure for SMA, the leading genetic killer of infants and toddlers.

The program, which was launched in 2003, provides promising researchers and their mentors the support needed to initiate unique research projects that will provide invaluable information into the cause, treatment and potential cure for SMA. Applications from a broad range of research interests including genetics, physiology, biochemistry and clinical medicine are highly desired, as are applications from investigators new to the field of SMA.

“These grants demonstrate the commitment to cutting edge research through encouragement of critically timed support for promising young researchers,” said Thomas M. Jessell, Ph.D., Investigator, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Director, Neuroscience Institute at Columbia University and mentor for a 2004 grantee. “As funds for original research become increasingly more difficult to obtain, the SMA program provides solutions to issues at many levels in neuroscience and will support important progress in SMA.”

Spinal muscular atrophy is a genetic, motor neuron disease characterized by the wasting of skeletal muscles. Caused by progressive degeneration of nerve cells in the spinal cord, the disease leads to increasing muscular weakness and atrophy. Spinal muscular atrophy is often compared to a genetic form of polio. Over time, its victims continue to lose muscle control and strength, leading to progressive inability to walk, stand, sit up and eventually move. More than 50% of patients with SMA die before the age of two.

"This is a critical time in SMA research, a time when the right resources directed in the right places will lead to potential new treatments for this disease," stated Loren Eng, SMA Foundation's co-founder and president. "As we enter our second year of the program, these awards will enable promising young investigators the opportunity to pursue research that may yield huge scientific dividends, with an immediate and rapid impact on the lives of SMA patients."

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The program invites applications from investigators with an interest in clinical research – MDs, DOs, MD/PhDs, and PhDs – who have completed residency or post-doctoral training within the past 10-years and seek a long-term career as an independent scientist in the area of SMA.

Applications and supporting materials should be submitted no later than October 1, 2004 to the American Academy of Neurology Foundation. Grant applications and requirements are available on the SMA Foundation web site, [www.smafoundation.org](http://www.smafoundation.org) or the American Academy of Neurology Foundation web site, [www.neurofoundation.org](http://www.neurofoundation.org). For additional information, please contact Scott Palmer by telephone at (651) 695-2756 or by e-mail at [spalmer@aan.com](mailto:spalmer@aan.com). Research grant recipients will be announced in January 2005. Funding of grant awards is anticipated in the summer of 2005.

### **About the SMA Foundation**

The SMA Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded in 2003 dedicated to finding a treatment and potential cure for Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) through funding the implementation and advancement of clinical research into the disease. In addition, the Foundation is committed to raising awareness, education and increased federal funding and support. For more information on the Spinal Muscular Atrophy Foundation, visit [www.smafoundation.org](http://www.smafoundation.org) or call (646) 253-7100.

### **About the AAN Foundation**

The AAN Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to broadening the base of support for public education and research in neurology. Its parent organization, the American Academy of Neurology, is an association of more than 18,000 neurologists and neuroscience professionals dedicated to improving patient care through education and research. A neurologist is a doctor with specialized training in diagnosing, treating and managing disorders of the brain and nervous system such as stroke, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, autism and spinal muscular atrophy.

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