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Dear Supporter,

Somehow, we're already into the second month of the new year. Here's your February brief.

News

We have a winner. Yesterday, we announced distinguished hematologist and stem cell scientist Dr. Leonard Zen as the 2026 winner of our most prestigious award, the March of Dimes Richard B. Johnston, Jr., MD Prize, for his incredible lifetime achievements in developmental biology. Dr. Zon's novel work in the 1.5-inch zebrafish has revealed how blood develops in embryos, leading to better understanding of rare blood diseases, including in pregnancy, as well as transformative treatments for genetic blood disorders affecting babies and children. Notably, his zebrafish work allowed his lab to discover ferroportin, the iron transporter gene that delivers the crucial micronutrient from mother

to baby, identify a growth factor that exponentially grows stem cell populations for use in gene therapies for children with blood disorders, and led to novel therapeutics for rare diseases affecting children.

Read our press release on his win here.

Awards

Mark your calendars! On February 27, you can formally submit a proposal for our Basil O'Connor Starter Scholar Research Awards, which are given annually to outstanding scientists embarking on or continuing independent research careers. In just nine days, submit your proposals.

Blog

This month's blog is a big one. It announces the start of a historic clinical trial beginning right now in London, funded by March of Dimes and spearheaded by our Prematurity Research Center (PRC) at Imperial College London. The trial, which is testing whether a vaginal live biotherapeutic containing "good" Lactobacillus crispatus bacteria can lower rates of preterm birth in high-risk women, is the first of its kind. If results from this multi-year trial show the bacteria is effective at preventing preterm birth, the therapeutic could begin a road to clinical approval and use. Big, big stuff.

Be among the first to read about it here.

Podcast

Our latest MODCAST is all about aspirin to prevent preterm birth and preeclampsia, and new research testing whether a higher dose might be necessary for at risk pregnant women with diabetes or a higher BMI. MODCAST guest Dr. Rupsa Boelig, who is one of last year's winners of the March of Dimes Discovery Research Grant, explains on the latest episode that since aspirin is a blood thinner that reduces clotting, including clotting that leads to disease processes linked with preeclampsia and preterm birth,

women with diabetes or a higher BMI who have higher blood volume may simply need more aspirin to have the same effect. So she's testing her hypothesis in a new study on the metabolism of aspirin in this demographic.

Listen here or watch here.

Publications

Vaginal microbe media (VMM): a novel medium to culture Lactobacillus iners and other fastidious vaginal bacteria

Microbiota composition of the female reproductive tract and miscarriage: a systematic review and meta-analysis

Targeting CRHR1 Signaling in Experimental Infantile Epileptic Spasms Syndrome: Evidence for Route-Dependent Efficacy

Understanding Disease Aetiology and Related Needs Knowledge of Parents of Children With Spina Bifida

Third Generation Consequences of Small for Gestational Age Births

Culturally Engaged REcovery - MOms connected through Native CommunitY (CEREMONY): An Implementation Study to Evaluate the Adaptation and Implementation of an Integrated Perinatal SUD Clinical Model for Pregnant and Postpartum Native People

The ELEVATE Maternal Health Center of Excellence: A Program to Reduce Maternal Morbidity From Substance Use Disorder in Utah

Native American Pregnant and Postpartum People's Experiences of Discrimination During Perinatal Care: A Qualitative Study

Host, microbial and environmental drivers of vaginal microbiota composition

That's it for February. See you in March.

Dr. Emre Seli

Chief Scientific Advisor
March of Dimes

HEALTHY MOMS. STRONG BABIES.

MARCH OF DIMES

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March of Dimes
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Arlington, VA 22202
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