Dr. Ramaswamy Receives $2.34 Million NIH Grant to Evaluate Lymphatic Filariasis Vaccine

For Immediate Release
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Dr. Ramaswamy Kalyanasundaram, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology, Head of the Biomedical Sciences Department, and Assistant Dean for Research at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford, recently received a grant worth up to $2,342,954 over the next four years. This grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, will fund research to evaluate a lymphatic filariasis vaccine.

Dr. Ramaswamy recently returned from a five-month sabbatical in his homeland of India where he aims to eradicate lymphatic filariasis. Commonly known as elephantiasis, the tropical disease is transmitted by mosquitoes carrying filarial parasites. The second leading cause of physical disability in the world, approximately 80% of those at high risk for lymphatic filariasis reside in 10 countries including India, Nigeria, Nepal, and the Philippines, according to the World Health Organization.

For more than a decade, Dr. Ramaswamy, has been developing a promising vaccine candidate that is now ready for further evaluation, thanks in part to funding from the NIH.

The findings from Dr. Ramaswamy’s five month study in India show new infections emerging in all the villages examined with only a small percentage of the population immune to
the infection. Dr. Ramaswamy proposes that all people living in the identified “hot spots” be treated and vaccinated, once all clinical trials are successfully completed of course, to eradicate the disease. This process would need to be repeated in all the endemic communities throughout India. The first task would be to identify all the ‘hot spots’ in India.

A faculty member at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford for over two decades, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Master of Science in Medical Biotechnology Program on the Rockford Campus in 2007. Well-published, he has served as an invited lecturer to many institutions, is a grant reviewer for NIH and other agencies, and is an editor and ad hoc reviewer for many professional journals. His grant and research activities are extensive, mainly funded by NIH. Currently, he holds three patents.

He is a 2009 recipient of the INSPIRE award sponsored by the Alumni Association of the University of Illinois and the Distinguished Alumni Award from the College of Veterinary Medicine in Kerala, India, among several others. He is a member of the American Society for Microbiology, the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, the Indian Association for the Advancement of Veterinary Parasitology, The American Society for Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, the Federation of American Society for Experimental Biology, and the American Association of Immunologists.

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http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_info_description.cfm?aid=8850240&icde=24239616&ddparam=
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