ENDOCRINE SOCIETY
Hormone Science to Health

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Dear Dr. Nakamura,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Endocrine Society regarding the review of cancer-related grants involving nuclear receptors (NRs). Founded in 1916, the Endocrine Society is the world's oldest, largest and most active organization devoted to research on hormones and the clinical practice of endocrinology. Our membership of over 18,000 includes basic researchers, clinical researchers, and clinicians in practice. Our researcher members include many of the world's leading experts in the science of hormone receptors and their relevance to hormone-dependent and hormone-related cancers.

We have noticed that the number of NR-cancer grants assigned to the Molecular and Cellular Endocrinology (MCE) study section has been declining. Instead, cancer-related grants involving NRs are being assigned to other study sections, such as Tumor Cell Biology (TCB) or Molecular Oncogenesis (MONC). MCE's roster includes members with expertise in nuclear receptor and hormone biology, whereas other study sections lack sufficient depth of expertise to evaluate the scientific merit of research proposals in hormone-dependent cancers involving NRs. Additionally, many grants are being sent to Special Emphasis Panels (SEPs); the makeup of these is highly variable and it is not clear that sufficient expertise for rigorous review of NR-cancer grants is available for all panels. This, in turn, may discourage potential study section members from agreeing to serve on a study section, for fear of inconsistent review of their own grants by a SEP. In summary, the grant assignment process is distributing grants involving NRs to numerous study sections, oftentimes with ad hoc members to cover limitations in expertise. This may dilute the expertise needed to review such grants and to rank their relative merit.

NR-cancer grants involve common core topics, such as nuclear receptor biology, physiology, and pathophysiology, regardless of disease, that require a dedicated and knowledgeable cadre of peer reviewers. We believe that the most effective way to provide a fair review is for CSR 1) to identify the study sections to which NR-cancer grants should be assigned, for example, TCB and MONC, and 2) to ensure that sufficient expertise in the field of nuclear receptors to evaluate these grants is present in these study sections. A consistent approach that reviews most, if not all, of these

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proposals with the same metrics and based on the stage of progression of cancer should enhance the ability to select the highest quality in the field.

To clarify how NR-cancer grants are treated, and to help identify the appropriate study sections to manage these grants, we recommend that CSR study and assess grants in this subject area, and use the results of the assessment to identify the appropriate study sections that will be tasked with managing each subset of NR-cancer grants. On the web page for these study sections, a phrase included in the "topics" section should clearly articulate that such grants are appropriate for those panels. For example, there are no study sections that currently list "studies dealing with mechanisms of hormone receptor action in hormone-driven cancers" as part of the topics they regularly review.

As you know, the Endocrine Society regularly submits lists of grant reviewers to CSR and many SROs for endocrine-related study sections. In the Appendix, we provide a more specialized list of U.S. based senior investigators with expertise in NR-cancer research who are Endocrine Society members. We hope that you find this list useful for recruiting study section members with expertise in NR and cancer for the designated study sections.

The Endocrine Society appreciates the role of CSR in supporting the work done by our basic and clinical research communities. We hope that the proposal outline above represents a constructive approach to ensure that NR-cancer grants receive an equitable review. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this proposal with you in an in-person meeting. To set up such a meeting, please do not hesitate to contact Joseph Laakso, Associate Director of Science Policy at jlaakso@endocrine.org.

Sincerely,

Henry Kronenberg

Henry Kronenberg, MD
President
Endocrine Society

APPENDIX

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