

Prize4Life Marks One-Year Anniversary of Avi Kremer ALS Treatment Prize

Prize, Named for Israeli Entrepreneur, Seeks Treatments for Lou Gehrig's Disease

Cambridge, MA, October 9, 2009 -- Prize4Life, a non-profit organization dedicated to accelerating research into treatments and a cure for ALS, is celebrating the one-year anniversary of its latest prize, the Avi Kremer ALS Treatment Prize. The Treatment Prize is a one million dollar (\$1M USD) award for finding a treatment candidate that reliably and significantly increases the lifespan in mouse models of ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), known in the US as Lou Gehrig's disease. The Treatment Prize is open to all interested researchers worldwide with the goal of accelerating the discovery of treatments and cures for ALS.

ALS is a rapidly progressing neurodegenerative disease that typically steals the life of patients within 2-5 years after diagnosis. It is caused by the degeneration of motor neurons, the nerve cells in the central nervous system that control voluntary muscle movement. It most commonly strikes people between the ages of 40 and 70, and affects men slightly more than women. ALS is the most common motor neuron disease worldwide and as many as 30,000 Americans battle with it at any given time. There is no known cure for ALS and only one FDA-approved treatment, Rilutek, which extends life by 2-3 months.

With the ALS Treatment Prize, Prize4Life is hoping to increase the number of novel ALS treatments in the drug development pipeline. As a critical first step to expanding the pipeline of potential new therapies, the Treatment Prize encourages testing of a wide variety of potential therapies in ALS animal models, a critical scientific and regulatory hurdle for the development of new drugs.

“An effective treatment for ALS is desperately needed, and the existing mouse model is the primary gateway to clinical trials. The identification of a treatment capable of meeting the high survival bar set forward in this prize should attract the attention of those with the resources necessary to move a potentially effective ALS therapy into the clinic,” said Dr. Tom Maniatis, Chair of the Biochemistry & Molecular Biophysics Program at Columbia University, a prominent ALS researcher and member of Prize4Life's Scientific Advisory Board. “The Kremer prize will only be awarded for a therapy that makes a major difference in the disease, the kinds of therapies that ALS patients really need.”

Prize4Life was the first disease-oriented organization to utilize the incentive prize model to address neurodegenerative disease. “There are challenges to this model, to be sure,” noted Dr. Maniatis, “but if Prize4Life succeeds, the payoff could be huge. This effort could have major implications not just for ALS patients, but for any group looking to bring new ideas to the table for solving a biomedical problem.”

After its first year, the Treatment Prize has attracted teams from industry and academia from across the globe. Competing teams are pursuing several therapeutic approaches, including cell-based therapies to replace damaged cells and the use of protein biologics, and small molecule drugs to interfere with pathways implicated in disease progression (see website for more information).

Says Treatment Prize competitor Michal Schwartz, professor at the Weizmann Institute of Science: “We believe that the approach that we have pioneered is promising, a paradigm shift. By exposing our approach to the community, we are hoping that additional scientists will be

inspired.” Schwartz’s lab has identified a severe immune deficit and immunosuppression in ALS patients and mouse models, is seeking ways to rejuvenate or arrest immune malfunction.

In support of its Treatment Prize competitors, Prize4Life has partnered with the Jackson Laboratory to provide quality-controlled SOD1 mice for preclinical drug testing. They have also prepared educational materials to assure that protocols are properly designed and study outcomes are useful for preclinical drug testing in the ALS SOD1 mouse model. This is part of the organization’s ongoing commitment to supporting researchers with useful tools and infrastructure.

The Avi Kremer ALS Treatment Prize has a rolling deadline. If no winning solutions are submitted, the prize will be closed to further submissions in October 2010. Interested researchers can learn more about the prize and register to compete at www.prize4life.org.

About Prize4Life

Prize4Life was founded by a group of Harvard Business School students when one of them, Avi Kremer, was diagnosed with ALS at the age of 29. Prize4Life works to accelerate the discovery of a treatment and a cure for ALS by using powerful incentives to attract new people and ideas, and to leverage existing efforts and expertise in the ALS field. Among other program initiatives, the organization currently administers the ALS Biomarker Prize Challenge, the Avi Kremer ALS Treatment Prize, and the ALS Forum (www.researchals.org).

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