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Seattle’s Infectious Disease Research Institute Receives Federal Grant for Innovation to Enhance RNA Vaccine Efficacy

IDRI’s team of researchers, led by Dr. Emily Voigt, begin study to improve the immune response to any RNA-based vaccine

SEATTLE — March 8, 2021 — Seattle’s [Infectious Disease Research Institute \(IDRI\)](#) today announced that its RNA vaccine team manager, Emily Voigt, Ph.D., has received a federal grant to support her team’s innovative development of better, stronger RNA-based vaccines. Work under the two-year grant from the Department of Defense’s Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP) began on February 15, 2021.

Dr. Voigt and her team are exploring methods of engineering RNA vaccine to make them stronger and longer-lasting. “By focusing on further enhancing the efficacy of RNA vaccines, we’re not only helping to drive solutions to the COVID-19 crisis, but also future pandemics,” said Dr. Voigt. “RNA vaccines can be quickly and easily adapted for new and emerging pathogens and even pre-manufactured to speed distribution. In our upcoming study, our team will be testing new ways to make these vaccines even more effective, and there’s never been a more important time to do that.”

Much of IDRI’s research centers around tools and technologies that improve the immune response to infectious diseases; one such technology is known as an “adjuvant,” which is a molecule that strengthens the body’s immune response. Adjuvants act by broadening and / or lengthening the duration of vaccine protection. Adjuvants are an essential part of many traditional vaccines, but current RNA vaccines lack them. Dr. Voigt’s team will be working to incorporate adjuvants into RNA vaccines, both technologies used by IDRI as well as the technologies featured in the current messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines approved for use, such as the vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer / BioNTec.

Dr. Voigt will begin the study by establishing proof-of-concept with a yellow fever vaccine based on IDRI’s novel RNA vaccine platform, but advances discovered would be applicable not only to IDRI’s COVID-19 RNA vaccine, currently being developed in partnership with the biotechnology company Amryis, but to any RNA vaccine.

The Department of Defense explains the intent of the grant awarded to Dr. Voigt is to “support innovative, non-incremental, high-risk/potentially high-reward research that will provide new insights, paradigms, technologies, or applications. Studies supported by this award are expected to lay the groundwork for future avenues of scientific investigation. The proposed research project should include a well formulated, testable hypothesis based on a sound scientific rationale and study design....Innovation is the most important review criterion.”

IDRI is currently partnering with several academic, private, public and nonprofit organizations from around the world to collaborate on promising COVID-19 vaccine and treatment technologies, and further to develop RNA vaccines and adjuvant formulations for pandemic preparedness and rapid, effective pandemic response. For more information, visit www.idri.org.

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About IDRI

As a nonprofit biotech organization located in Seattle, Wash., IDRI (Infectious Disease Research Institute) combines high-quality scientific research with product development and manufacturing capabilities to help combat some of the world's deadliest disease, including COVID-19. For nearly three decades, much of IDRI's work has been focused on creating technologies that improve the body's natural response to disease. It is IDRI's mission as a non-profit devoted to science to make these technologies widely available at a low cost and to build a world in which every person has access to the tools that harness their immune systems and allow for a long, healthy life free of disease. Founded in 1993, IDRI has 55 employees with more than 100 partners/collaborators around the world. For more information, visit IDRI online at www.idri.org.