Thanks to the support of SAA, the SAA CTL continued to bring leading-edge immunotherapies to our patients for improved outcomes in diseases that were previously resistant to treatment.

One of the benefits of nurturing new ideas in research is the ability to build on the initial concepts, constantly improving the technology and expanding on successes to treat more patients. This has indeed been the result of SAA grants to CTL.

When SAA CTL first started receiving SAA funding 10 years ago, the explosion of cell therapies was only just on the horizon. Among those technologies implemented with SAA funds were Chimeric Antigen T Cell Receptors (CAR T), using a manufacturing process unique to this site to potentially improve safety and efficacy over other CAR T processes. The purchase of new equipment, including new flow cytometers, and education of staff funded by SAA provided us with the expertise to treat more patients with these therapies. A recent National Comprehensive Cancer Network survey showed that Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) was among only four centers in the country to initiate CAR Ts prior to 2015. SAA funding to CTL was essential to that early start to treat patients, many of whom experienced complete responses. Since that time, SCCA has treated over 250 patients, more than any other respondent in the survey. The expertise and resources developed in SAA CTL are now proving critical to the selection of our facility by sponsors who are creating an ever-increasing number and variety of cell therapies for our patients for more types of cancer.

SAA funding has also supported research pioneered by Dr. Marie Bleakley to reduce GVHD by removing a subset of T cells from the mix of hematopoietic cells collected from a donor. We have now treated 140 patients with leukemia by this method, significantly reducing complications from transplants and increasing survival. Based on these positive outcomes, two additional clinical trials have started, and a trial has been expanded to seven cancer centers around the country, multiplying the benefit of this innovation.
Swim Across America 2019 Impact Report — Pancreas Specialty Clinic

Receiving a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer can be stressful and overwhelming. At the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, we have made treatment of this cancer a priority with our Pancreatic Cancer Specialty Clinic (PCSC). This clinic is unique in the Pacific Northwest, taking a truly multi-disciplinary approach which results in the rapid development of personalized care plans and access to the latest treatments available for every patient.

Generous funding from Swim Across America (SAA) is helping our researchers to better understand pancreas cancer on multiple levels. Our researchers and medical teams move fearlessly against this cancer and are better understanding pancreas cancer through collection and analysis of pancreas tumors and molecular diagnostic testing of tumors, as well as funding research pilot studies. SAA is fueling the engine of research in an area of vital need, helping translate bench science to bedside medicine.

In order to rigorously assess novel detection and treatment strategies that emerge from the laboratory, they must be corroborated with findings in humans. The collection of human specimens is a complex and challenging multi-step process. At SCCA, Dr. Sunil Hingorani has developed the Center for Accelerated Translation in Pancreas Cancer (CATPAC), establishing a biospecimen repository available to all researchers. With continued support of SAA, CATPAC continues to partner with the Pancreas Cancer Specialty Clinic and expand its collection of tissue from pancreas cancers removed during surgery.

Researchers often have a very difficult time obtaining traditional grant support to explore novel ideas until some initial data is collected to support the proposal. Over the past 10 years, Swim Across America has funded 11 pilot funds in support of innovative projects with the potential to advance detection, diagnosis and treatment, and survival rates of patients with pancreas cancer. We are grateful to SAA for its continued support and helping advance the field of research so that we can turn the tide on pancreas cancer and give our patients the outcomes we all desire.