



Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC) Congratulates  
2018 Nobel Laureates, Past SITC Smalley Award Recipients,  
James P. Allison, PhD, and Tasuku Honjo, MD, PhD**

MILWAUKEE – The Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC) congratulates James P. Allison, PhD, and Tasuku Honjo, MD, PhD, renowned cancer immunotherapy scientists and past recipients of the society's highest honor, for their reception of the Nobel Prize in the category of physiology or medicine.

Dr. Allison, Chair of the Department of Immunology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, and a SITC member since 2001, along with Prof. Honjo, Professor at the Department of Immunology and Genomic Medicine at Kyoto University in Japan, were awarded the Nobel Prize, "for their discovery of cancer therapy by inhibition of negative immune regulation," the prize's committee announced on Monday. Dr. Allison and Prof. Honjo are both past recipients of the SITC Richard V. Smalley, MD, Memorial Award and Lectureship, in 2010 and 2015, respectively. The SITC Smalley Award is the society's highest honor recognizing a clinician/scientist who has contributed significantly to the advancement of cancer immunotherapy research.

Dr. Allison and Prof. Honjo helped pioneer the emerging field of immune checkpoint blockade therapy, which has become a foundational component of cancer treatment across the globe.

Research efforts lead by Dr. Allison helped define the role of CTLA-4 (cytotoxic T-lymphocyte-associated protein 4) in immune system inhibition, and discovered that treatment of mice with an anti-CTLA-4 monoclonal antibody increased immune system elimination of cancer cells. These data ultimately contributed to the development of anti-CTLA-4 ipilimumab, which in 2011 became the first immune checkpoint inhibitor to gain approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat cancer patients.

"Dr. Allison's contributions towards the discovery and clinical development of immune checkpoint inhibitors have had an incalculable impact on cancer immunotherapy research and clinical translation," said SITC President Lisa H. Butterfield, PhD. "Immunotherapy approaches to treat cancer may have existed for more than 100 years, but it was Dr. Allison's breakthroughs in the lab which shed new light on these regulatory circuits that then enabled the revolution we now have in the field for patients. I am delighted to celebrate Dr. Allison's newfound status as a Nobel Laureate."

Research lead by Prof. Honjo helped identify PD-1 (Programmed cell death protein-1) as an integral component of immune system inhibition, noting that disruption of PD-1 in pre-clinical models resulted in increased immune system activity. This integral information helped initiate the development of anti-PD-1/PD-L1 (Programed death ligand-1) checkpoint inhibitors that are now widely used for the treatment of patients with cancer.

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“The importance of the PD-1/PD-L1 pathway as a target for cancer treatment was a major advance made by Professor Honjo,” said SITC Immediate Past President Howard L. Kaufman. “His work identified a single immune pathway as critical to treating many different types of cancer, a finding that has established tumor immunotherapy as a valid approach for the treatment of cancer.”

While a SITC member for 17 years, Dr. Allison also served on the SITC Board of Directors from 2000-2001, co-chaired the society’s 2009 Annual Meeting, and has served as faculty, speaker and organizer of numerous other SITC meetings through the years.

“Dr. Allison’s insights have led to the development of life saving therapies for many patients,” said Patrick Hwu, MD, Head of the Division of Cancer Medicine at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. “In my own melanoma practice, I have numerous patients who previously would have had very poor prognoses, but are now living disease free for years due to these advances.”

A harmonica player, Dr. Allison is also a member of The CheckPoints, SITC’s house band featuring other luminaries in cancer immunotherapy research. Dr. Allison and The CheckPoints perform several times a year in support of the [SITC Forward Fund](#), which provides grants and other research opportunities for early career scientists in the field of cancer immunotherapy. The CheckPoints will take the stage again on Saturday, Nov. 10, 2018 during the [SITC 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting](#).

“These are incredibly important agents that have changed the way we treat cancer. They’ve benefited an enormous number of patients since their introduction into clinical trials, and have opened the field, creating excitement and increasing investment in research, which will lead to even greater treatment advances,” said SITC Vice President Mario Sznol, MD. “I congratulate Dr. Allison and Professor Honjo for their achievements, and also recognize the many others in the cancer research community who have played important roles in defining the biology of these pathways and bringing these agents into the clinic for our patients.”

Drs. Allison and Honjo are now the second and third SITC Smalley Award recipients to become Nobel Laureates. Ralph M. Steinman, MD, a [2011 recipient of the Smalley Award](#), was posthumously awarded the Nobel Prize in 2011 in the physiology or medicine category for his discovery of the dendritic cell and its role in adaptive immunity. To learn more about Dr. Allison and view several of his presentations from SITC meetings, [visit SITC Cancer Immunotherapy CONNECT, the society’s official website](#).

### **About SITC**

Established in 1984, the Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC) is a nonprofit organization of medical professionals dedicated to improving cancer patient outcomes by advancing the development, science and application of cancer immunotherapy and tumor immunology. SITC is comprised of influential basic and translational scientists, practitioners, health care professionals, government leaders and industry professionals around the globe. Through educational initiatives that foster scientific exchange and collaboration among leaders in the field, SITC aims to one day make the word “cure” a reality for cancer patients everywhere. Learn more about SITC, our educational offerings and other resources at [sitcancer.org](http://sitcancer.org) and follow us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

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