ALLERGAN INNOVATION AWARD WINNER ANNOUNCED AT TTMI SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

-PRESTIGIOUS AWARD TO FURTHER BOWEL CANCER RESEARCH-

Ms. Aisling Heeran, a Ph.D. Student in TTMI, received this year’s Allergan Innovation Award. The programme rewards and supports scholars that excel in innovative research with high potential impact in the therapeutic space. This year’s winner demonstrated an innovative approach that in time will hopefully transform the treatment plan for bowel cancer patients, developing a companion diagnostic test to predict treatment response in rectal cancer patients. The award valued at €8,500 will help to advance Ms Heeran’s research and offers a place in the Innovation and Entrepreneurship postgrad to assist with commercialising research.

Aisling Heeran is a former recipient of ‘Jane Grimson Medal of Excellence’ by the Irish Research Council in 2017 for being the top-ranked postgraduate researcher in the STEM category. Ms Heeran’s research is co-supervised by Prof. Jacintha O’Sullivan and Dr Niamh Lynam-Lennon. Results from the research will help to develop a test that can predict which rectal tumours will or will not respond to treatment.

Rectal cancer is cancer in the lower part of the bowel and has a poor survival rate. The treatment for rectal cancer is chemotherapy and radiotherapy before surgery. Despite this, treatment will only completely remove the tumour for about 30% of patients, and currently, there is no understanding of the biology underpinning this. Patients receiving radiotherapy are also at higher risk of developing another cancer near the area that has received radiation which also requires further investigation.

Ms Aisling Heeran said:

“This award will be an invaluable addition to my Irish Research Council postgraduate scholarship as it will provide funding to expand the scope of my research, and I am deeply grateful to Allergan for their support with this bursary.

The opportunity to complete the postgraduate certificate in Innovation and Entrepreneurship will be instrumental for my career. To date, there are no commercially available companion diagnostic tests to predict response in rectal cancer patients. So knowledge of how best to navigate the route to market is a key step in realising the full potential of this project’’

The Allergan Innovation Award Programme coincides with the annual TTMI Scientific Symposium which this year focused on the theme of Cancer Precision Medicine. The event which took place last Friday 15th February showcased the breath of promising translational research work ongoing within TTMI and its partnering hospitals.

Francis Bates, Vice President Global Solid Oral Dosage Manufacturing at Allergan & Plant General Manager at the manufacturing facility at Clonshaugh in Dublin said: “We are delighted that the Allergan Innovation Award Programme will allow researchers, such as Aisling, to further advance their studies in the field of Life and Health Sciences. For a company such as Allergan, scientific research and innovation are essential to the future of our industry, so we hope that this Innovation Award will inspire the next generation of pioneering researchers. Collaborating with a prestigious institute, such as Trinity College Dublin, is an exciting initiative for all involved, and we look forward to the positive results and experiences it will bring for students and our industry.”
Prof. Orla Sheils, Director of TTMI said:

“The calibre of applications received for the Allergan Award was impeccable and an impossible task for the Committee to adjudicate.”

The annual programme in partnership with six Higher Education Institutions to include TCD was initially launched by Allergan in 2017 to celebrate 40 successful years of business in Ireland, and to strengthen ties with the University research community.

L-R Francis Bates (Allergan Plant General Manager), Professor Jacintha O’Sullivan (TCD), Aisling Heeran (Innovation Award winner) Ken Finnegan (TCD Tangent), Dr. Daniel Rogers (TCD Tangent)
Aisling Heeran (Innovation Award winner)