

# Local researchers recipient of \$2 million grant from Michael J. Fox Foundation

SUZANNE ELLIOTT | Monday, March 26, 2018, 9:00 p.m.



Michael J. Fox

The Pittsburgh Institute for Neurodegenerative Disease and the University of Pittsburgh have received a \$2 million grant from the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research.

The grant money will be used to seek out links between environmental and genetic triggers of the disease, says Dr. J. Timothy Greenamyre, director of the Pittsburgh Institute of Neurodegenerative Diseases.

"This is a way to accelerate the research," he says. "Everyone has to hit the ground running."

The joint two-year project will investigate the mechanisms through which neurotoxins cause neurodegenerations and how these pathways interact with known genetic factors such as LRRK2, a leading genetic cause of the disease. Variants of this gene are associated with an increased risk of not only Parkinson's disease but also Crohn's disease.

"We're getting pretty good about figuring out the genetic mutations," Greenamyre says. "Right now we can only treat the symptoms."

Parkinson's is a progressive disorder of the nervous system that affects movement, according to the Mayo Clinic. Symptoms of the disease include tremors, slow movement, rigid muscles, loss of automatic movements such as blinking, speech changes and difficulty writing.

According to the Mayo Clinic, people usually develop Parkinson's at age 60 or older. Also, men are more likely to have the disease than women. Ongoing exposure to both herbicides and pesticides also may play a role. Head injuries also can factor into people developing Parkinson's.

"The vast diversity of pathways implicated in Parkinson's pathology to date indicates that multiple physiological routes can lead to PD, and these routes may intersect or be temporally dependent," Todd Sherer, chief executive officer of the Michael J. Fox Foundation, said in a statement.

"Our foundation believes it is our obligation to continue building on current research momentum to eradicate this disease once and for all," Sherer says.

The local grant was part of a \$6 million grant program tasked with researching known risk and causal factors toward discovery of common framework underlying the onset and progression of Parkinson's, the foundation said in a statement.

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