



The Bruce and Cynthia Sherman Charitable Foundation Announces the 2024 Sherman Prizes

Prize Recipients' Discoveries Have Transformed Treatment Practices and Research Paradigms and Accelerated the Advent of Personalized Medicine in IBD

BOCA RATON, Florida, September 18, 2024 – The Bruce and Cynthia Sherman Charitable Foundation today announced the recipients of the ninth annual Sherman Prizes, recognizing excellence in the field of Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, also known as inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD):

2024 Sherman Prize Honorees

- **Millie D. Long, MD, MPH**, Interim Division Chief; Professor of Medicine; Director of the Fellowship Program in the Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, University of North Carolina School of Medicine, Chapel Hill, NC
- **Dermot P.B. McGovern, MBBS, D. Phil (Oxon), FRCP (Lon), FACG, AGAF**, Director of Translational Medicine at the F. Widjaja Inflammatory Bowel Disease Institute; Director of the Precision Medicine Initiative; Professor of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences; Joshua L. and Lisa Z. Greer Endowed Chair in IBD Genetics at Cedars-Sinai, Los Angeles, CA

2024 Sherman Emerging Leader Prize Honoree

- **Jordan E. Axelrad, MD, MPH**, Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine; Co-Director, Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center at NYU Langone Health, New York, NY

“This year’s Sherman Prize recipients, Drs. Long, McGovern, and Axelrad, have dedicated their careers to answering patients’ most fundamental questions – what’s the best treatment for me, is it safe, how can I prevent complications,” said Bruce and Cynthia Sherman, Founders of the Sherman Prize. “With a ‘never say never’ mindset, they form powerful collaborations to drive science forward and share their findings with the wider IBD care community. Through these efforts and their commitment to mentoring the next generation of providers, they are making an enduring impact on the lives of people with IBD around the world.”

Prize recipients will be honored at the Advances in IBD (AIBD) conference in Orlando, Florida on December 10, 2024, where their short tribute films will be premiered. The films may be viewed at www.ShermanPrize.org following the conference.

“Sherman Prize recipients each blaze different paths to improve outcomes for people with IBD, but what they have in common is a laser focus on solving some of the greatest puzzles of these diseases,” said Dr. Maria T. Abreu, 2024 Selection Committee Chair and 2019 Sherman Prize Recipient. “I can’t wait to watch the tribute films for Drs. Long, McGovern, and Axelrad and give the wider IBD community a glimpse of the passion and dedication of these inspiring physician scientists who are creating a better future for people with IBD.”

About the 2024 Prize Recipients

Dr. Millie D. Long is awarded a \$100,000 Sherman Prize for innovating new practices in inflammatory bowel disease prevention and leading advances in research, clinical care and education.

An incredibly accomplished researcher, educator, and clinician, Dr. Millie Long is known and described as a ‘triple threat’ by her IBD colleagues. With a primary focus on prevention, Dr. Long leads efforts to prevent complications of IBD and the medicines used to treat the diseases. As she pursues this research, she’s always centered on the lived experience of her patients.

For example, when she observed cases of shingles in young patients, Dr. Long initiated research to better understand this risk across age groups and found that immunosuppressive medications were associated with shingles at an earlier age. As a result, it’s now recommended that IBD patients on immunosuppression receive the shingles vaccine at age 19. Similarly, seeing skin cancers in young patients prompted Dr. Long to explore and define skin cancer risk associated with IBD therapies. She then went on to inform preventive medicine guidelines on skin cancer screening for people with IBD.

As a trained methodologist with a background in epidemiology and biostatistics, Dr. Long has the unique ability to translate research findings into guidelines that help others across the field improve patient outcomes. She was a senior author of the American College of Gastroenterology’s (ACG) 2019 UC guidelines and a methodologist on the Crohn’s disease guidelines.

On her journey to improve patient outcomes, Dr. Long is always innovating for patients. In the internet’s early days, she seized its potential to engage more patients in research. Along with her colleagues, Dr. Michael Kappelman and Dr. Robert Sandler at the University of North Carolina, she launched the first-ever internet-based cohort of IBD patients: The IBD Partners Patient-Powered Research Network (PPRN). Through this network, Dr. Long asked patients what mattered most to them – and crafted research protocols to answer their questions by collecting their self-reported data.

She says, “It now seems much more commonplace, but the patient voice was not as prioritized at that time in research. This ability to think of a patient as a ‘citizen scientist’ was probably the most important part of the work that’s been done at UNC.”

The study ended up enrolling more than 16,000 IBD patients over more than a decade, with over 50 collaborative publications and became an important repository, especially for junior faculty to access the cohort for their research.

For Dr. Long, providing opportunities to junior clinicians and researchers through novel programs like the PPRN is a way to give back. She says she’s where she is today because of her teachers and mentors, and she seeks to provide that same service to the next generation through her role as the fellowship program director for the Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at UNC.

Looking to the future, she is excited about optimizing current therapies, conducting methodologically rigorous studies, such as comparative effectiveness trials, and to enhance a personalized medicine approach to IBD care so that everyone with IBD may benefit from transformational treatment.

Dr. Dermot P.B. McGovern is awarded a \$100,000 Sherman Prize for applying his genetics and GI expertise to accelerate the development of personalized medicines and address healthcare disparities around the world.

Dr. Dermot McGovern has spent a lifetime fundamentally advancing our understanding of the genetic architecture of IBD as he pursues his mission to deliver personalized medicine to patients.

A key driver and participant in most of the pivotal studies in IBD genetics of the past 15 years, Dr. McGovern's journey began when he was doing his PhD at Oxford at a time of burgeoning growth in IBD genetics. It was then that he had a formative experience with a patient who asked, 'How do you know this is the right treatment for me?' This question sparked Dr. McGovern's lifelong quest to identify drug targets and associated biomarkers to match the right medicine to the right patient.

A serendipitous connection early on led to one of his greatest partnerships in this endeavor.

When he was at Oxford, he and his collaborators identified a gene involved in the pathophysiology of IBD called TNF Superfamily 15. At the same time, Dr. Stephan Targan at Cedars-Sinai had discovered and was studying TL1A — a protein encoded by the gene. After a chance meeting, the two bonded over their shared pursuit and Dr. McGovern was invited to join the team at Cedars-Sinai.

Today Dr. McGovern leads the McGovern Lab — also called the Translational Genomics Group — at Cedars-Sinai. After two decades of collaboration with Dr. Targan and others on an anti-TL1A therapy, Dr. McGovern's dream of delivering a personalized approach is gaining momentum.

Dr. McGovern explains that their investigational therapy is completely different from existing therapies and also addresses a critical unmet need – fibrosis in Crohn's disease. And, for the first time in IBD, it has a companion diagnostic. If approved, it would be the first personalized medicine for people with IBD.

Driving its progress has been a case study in overcoming challenges. When others said it would be impossible to develop, he persevered. When industry passed on acquiring the compound to do the early trials, Dr. McGovern and his partners forged ahead and founded Precision IBD (which later became Prometheus Biosciences) to do it themselves. This bold move bridged the chasm to take the compound from the bench to the bedside. Ultimately, they completed a successful Phase 2 program, which convinced industry to take it the final mile.

Dr. McGovern credits teamwork for the success so far and says collaborations like these are what enable advances for patients. Now, he is working on other game-changing projects in his lab – such as improving the IBD classification system – with an eye toward broad global application.

"Humans are alike," says Dr. McGovern. "The same fears, worries, hopes. We have so much in common, far more than you might think if you watch the news or look at social media," he says. "It is this belief that drives my ethos that we should be trying to solve the disparities that exist in healthcare as opposed to ignoring or exacerbating them."

To this end, he has led the effort to extend largely European ancestry studies and advances to African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and East Asian populations. And he recently created a consortium to conduct genetic studies in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Improving patients' quality of life, regardless of their ethnicity, social status, gender or where they live, is Dr. McGovern's inspiration and life's purpose.

Dr. Jordan E. Axelrad is awarded the \$25,000 Sherman Emerging Leader Prize for his research on medication safety, therapeutic response and IBD triggers, and his contributions to building an internationally recognized IBD Center.

As an IBD clinician and researcher, Dr. Jordan Axelrad is fueled by the experiences of people like him who suffered from Crohn's disease at a young age and lost too much time to their disease. Their stories mirror his own in many respects and push him to do all he can to improve outcomes.

Since he joined NYU seven years ago, Dr. Axelrad has helped its young IBD program evolve into an internationally recognized IBD center with funding from the National Institute of Health, the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation, and others for his Axelrad Lab. Though early in his career, he has already pursued multiple fields of research to try to answer the questions he once asked himself as a patient – is it safe, will it work for me?

In the area of medication safety and cancer risk, he has shown that immunosuppressive medications do not significantly impact the risk of new or recurrent cancer in people with a previous history of cancer. This research led to funding for the first national prospective registry of people with IBD and cancer, called SAPPHIRE, which Dr. Axelrad co-leads. It has provided a new understanding of how to manage IBD in people with cancer.

Dr. Axelrad also established the NYU Langone IBD Biospecimen Repository and started an intestinal organoid program that uses tissue biopsies to study IBD pathogenesis and therapeutic response. His research has already helped to identify which patients are more likely to benefit from certain IBD therapies, specifically JAK inhibitors.

Finally, Dr. Axelrad is exploring what he considers the most important question in the field – why do people develop IBD or experience flare-ups? His recent research has shed new light on the role of infection, revealing that previous episodes of gastroenteritis increase the risk of developing IBD. Now, he is working to understand how infections, like norovirus and *Clostridioides difficile*, contribute to IBD.

When he reflects on all he's accomplished so far, Dr. Axelrad says, "All that wasted time in my youth, when I was grappling with Crohn's, wasn't for nothing. It led me here. That makes me feel like I'm exactly where I need to be to keep driving progress and make a difference for all of us living with this disease."

Recently, Dr. Axelrad was promoted to Associate Professor of Medicine at NYU Grossman School of Medicine, and he now serves as Co-Director of the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center at NYU Langone. But perhaps most impressive, according to his colleagues, is that Dr. Axelrad serves as an anchor for the continued growth of the IBD clinical research program at NYU, and has built a bridge between the clinical operations, clinical research, and translational research missions – all while providing the highest level of clinical care to his patients and helping to nurture up and coming providers at NYU Langone.

About the Sherman Prize

In 2016, Bruce and Cynthia Sherman established the Sherman Prize to provide national recognition and financial prizes to pioneering IBD professionals who exemplify excellence in Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Two \$100,000 Sherman Prizes have been awarded annually to IBD clinicians, surgeons, researchers, and academics, recognizing exceptional and pioneering contributions that transform the care of people with IBD. A \$25,000 Sherman Emerging Leader Prize has been awarded to an IBD clinician, surgeon, researcher, academic, or physician assistant, who, while early in his or her career, has contributed to an advancement and shows great promise for significant future contributions. With today's announcement, the Sherman Prize has honored 27 IBD practitioners from diverse specialties. Selection decisions are made by the Board of Directors, following an extensive review and evaluation by the Prize Selection Committee, which is comprised of five of the nation's preeminent IBD specialists. Visit [ShermanPrize.org](https://www.ShermanPrize.org) to view the Honor Roll of Sherman Prize recipients, watch their inspiring short tribute films, and sign up to receive notification of the 2025 nomination cycle.