

Continued Impact of the AACR Annual Meeting 2025 for the Associate Membership – By Kristin A. Altwegg, PhD

AMC Council Members Present

- Kristin A. Altwegg, PhD
- Katie M. Campbell, PhD
- Heather K. Beasley, PhD
- Cody Wolf, PhD
- Filippo Pederzoli, MD, PhD
- Greisha L. Ortiz Hernandez, PhD
- Johnson Ung, PhD
- Mathias Seviiri, PhD, MBChB, MPH
- Pablo Sanchis, PhD
- Wayne Lawrence, Dr PH; MPH
- Jessica Johnson, BS
- Rui Li, MD, PhD
- Michelle Guevara-Nieto, PhD

The AACR Annual Meeting 2025 in Chicago, Illinois, defied predictions this April by welcoming over 22,100 cancer researchers from 85 countries and territories. Thousands of abstracts were presented across hundreds of poster sessions, symposia, special sessions, and plenary sessions, highlighting the latest advances spanning the field of cancer research. Under the leadership of AACR Past President Patricia M. LoRusso, DO, PhD (hc), FAACR, and the Program Committee Co-chairs, AACR President-Elect Lillian L. Siu, MD, FAACR, and Matthew G. Vander Heiden, MD, PhD, there was great emphasis on the importance of connecting basic research with clinical applications to advance cancer treatment and prevention. Key areas of focus included groundbreaking clinical trials, emerging risk factors, the role of technology in cancer research, and the impact of health policies on cancer outcomes. This year's central message was that research, regardless of political context, is crucial for advancing cancer treatment and care. In collaboration with the [Science Education and Career Advancement Committee](#), Women in Cancer Research ([WICR](#)), and Minorities in Cancer Research ([MICR](#)) Councils, the Associate Member Council ([AMC](#)) coled five Professional Development Sessions, facilitating meaningful discussions on grant writing, career trajectories, and the importance of leadership and mentorship across an unprecedented participation by early-career researchers of all levels. In addition, AMC Past Chair Katie Campbell, PhD, Chair-Elect Heather K. Beasley, PhD, and Member Pablo A. Sanchis, PhD, were recognized as [AACR Social Media Ambassadors](#) by amplifying these events throughout the week. Kristin A. Altwegg, PhD, chair of the AMC, played a vital role in numerous professional development activities during the Annual Meeting, including presenting the AACR Award for Outstanding Achievement in Basic Cancer Research. Additionally, Cody Wolf, PhD, served as a panelist for the AACR featured session "Cancer Research at a Crossroads," which addressed the impact of recent federal actions and policy proposals on cancer research funding and patient care.

Fostering Professional Development

At the heart of the AACR Annual Meeting is the commitment to nurturing the next generation of cancer researchers. One of its key components is its plethora of networking opportunities through interactive events such as the WICR and MICR Meet and Greets, New Member Networking Mixers, and the Associate Member Council Meet and Greet. From casual exchanges during coffee breaks to structured networking events, the meeting is a platform for building invaluable connections within the cancer research community. These connections often lead to developing mentor-mentee relationships, career opportunities, or collaborations that propel novel scientific advancements. The AMC encourages all new AACR members and Associate members to participate in these key events and to get involved in the multitude of initiatives, councils, [committees](#), and [working groups](#) offered beyond the Annual Meeting.

Equally important are the grant writing workshops conducted during the meeting. Securing funding is vital for conducting impactful research, and these workshops provide attendees with the tools and insights to navigate the complex world of grant applications successfully. Specifically, this year's workshops focused on funding sources beyond traditional academic research funding, including foundations, corporations like the [American](#)

[Cancer Society](#), and specialized organizations such as [Cancer Research UK](#). Empowering researchers with grant writing skills ensures that innovative ideas have the financial support needed to flourish.

Two special programs at the AACR Annual Meeting, the [Undergraduate Student Caucus and Poster Competition](#) and the [Special Program for High School Students: The Conquest of Cancer and the Next Generation of Cancer Researchers](#), allow early-career trainees to present their research at several poster sessions. Each year, these sessions offer a platform for sharing findings and encourage constructive feedback and discussions. For high school and undergraduate researchers, it's a chance to gain exposure, receive mentorship, and refine their presentation skills—all crucial elements in their professional growth. AACR members maintain high involvement and participation in these special programs, serving as both mentors and panelists.

Recognizing Outstanding Achievements in Early-career Cancer Research

The AACR Annual Meeting is also a time to celebrate excellence in cancer research. Since its establishment in 1986, the AACR Annual Meeting Scholar-in-Training Award program has awarded more than 5,000 grants to emerging researchers, supported by over 70 cancer research foundations, corporations, individuals, and other organizations dedicated to combating cancer. These highly competitive awards honor exceptional young investigators who submit praiseworthy proffered papers for presentation at the AACR Annual Meeting. The funds from these awards aim to facilitate attendance at the Annual Meeting. This year, 179 early-career researchers received the prestigious Scholar-in-Training Award for their highly competitive research abstracts presented at the AACR Annual Meeting. In addition, the AACR welcomed 15 recipients of the Global Scholar-in-Training Award. The Global Scholar-In-Training program, now in its seventh year, brought promising scientists from 11 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Jordan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey, and Zambia) to participate in the AACR Annual Meeting 2025 in Chicago. Initiated in 2020, [the AACR Award for Outstanding Achievement in Basic Cancer Research](#) recognizes an individual early-career investigator, under the age of 46, who has made outstanding scientific accomplishments in basic cancer research. This year's recipient, [Han Liang, PhD](#), professor and deputy chair at University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, has more than earned this prestigious award for his contributions to cancer bioinformatics and systems biology. At special receptions, [Global Scholars](#), [Scholars-in-Training](#), [WICR Scholars](#), and [MICR Scholars](#) were honored for their outstanding contributions and potential to significantly impact the field. These accolades not only recognize past achievements but also serve as encouragement for future endeavors. By spotlighting exceptional individuals, the meeting inspires others to reach greater heights in their own research pursuits.

Spotlight on the Global Impact of Cancer: Innovative Solutions for Community Cancer Care

The AACR Annual Meeting 2025 highlighted the critical role of cancer research in saving lives, with attendees holding signs that read "[Cancer Research Saves Lives](#)." Overall, the meeting focused on the importance of funding for research, which has led to a 34% decrease in cancer mortality over the past three decades, according to AACR CEO Dr. Margaret Foti, PhD, MD (hc), and AACR Past President Patricia M. LoRusso, DO, PhD (hc), FAACR. The meeting also discussed the need for continued efforts to combat cancer, as projections indicate a rise in cancer deaths in the United States by 2050, according to Dr. Foti.



(Photo from AACR Annual Meeting News, aacrmeetingnews.org)

Furthermore, at the Annual Meeting, artificial intelligence (AI) was prominently featured in presentations and discussions, highlighting its transformative role in cancer research. AI models were used to analyze clinical and imaging data to predict conditions like cancer cachexia and nonmelanoma skin cancer, leading to more accurate diagnoses and potentially earlier interventions. Furthermore, AI is being explored for drug discovery, repurposing, and treatment response prediction, aiming to personalize cancer care and improve patient outcomes. At the forefront of AI in cancer care, the AACR is hosting a [Special Conference in Cancer Research: AI and Machine Learning](#) in July 2025 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Conclusions

The daily takeaways from the AACR Annual Meeting 2025 highlighted advancements in several key areas, including exciting new technologies, strategies for overcoming hurdles in therapeutic translation, targeting the cancer ecosystem, and progress in cancer vaccines. Additionally, the meeting emphasized the importance of patient representation in clinical trials and the impact of policy changes on cancer research.

The AACR Annual Meeting is more than just a gathering of the largest cancer research organization in the world; it's a catalyst for collaboration, innovation, and progress in the fight against cancer. Through its focus on professional development, celebration of excellence, and promotion of scientific communication, the meeting cultivates a vibrant community of researchers dedicated to making a difference and saving patient lives. As we reflect on the impact of the AACR Annual Meeting 2025, we are reminded of the collective effort required to conquer cancer and each individual's role in shaping a brighter future.