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### **MCCRF Awards Christopher J. LaRocca, M.D. the Peter Wilhoit Memorial Grant to Study Novel Colorectal Cancer Treatments using an Oncolytic Adenovirus**

The Minnesota Colorectal Cancer Research Foundation has awarded the 2023 Peter Wilhoit Memorial Grant to Dr. Christopher J. LaRocca. Dr LaRocca will be using the grant to further his research using oncolytic viruses for the treatment of cancer.

“By modifying an adenovirus (a virus that typically causes the common cold), we can selectively target, infect, and kill specific types of cancer cells,” Dr. LaRocca commented. “I am thrilled to receive the Wilhoit Memorial Grant, as it will support my efforts to develop a novel treatment regimen for patients with metastatic colorectal cancer.”

Dr LaRocca is a surgical oncologist at the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. His research has an investigational focus on the use of oncolytic viruses for the treatment of cancer— specifically to show how adenovirus can be designed to express genes at the local tumor site. One such gene is the sodium iodide symporter (NIS), which can be used to facilitate cancer imaging and therapy when combined with radioactive iodine. Dr. LaRocca’s main project is using the NIS expressing adenovirus to develop a novel treatment regimen for patients with metastatic colorectal cancer.

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The **Minnesota Colorectal Cancer Research Foundation** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation which funds colon and rectal cancer research in Minnesota. The mission of the foundation is to build a community of colorectal cancer survivors, and their family and friends, who will work passionately to raise money to fund research that will improve the survival and quality of life of people with colon and rectal cancer. The Sarah DeBord Memorial Grant is given annually to promote research projects that support access to care.

**Christopher J. LaRocca** is an Assistant Professor, Division of Surgical Oncology at the University of Minnesota. His main research interests are in gene therapy and oncolytic virotherapy. As a surgeon-scientist, he works to translate novel therapeutics to the clinic to bridge the gap between the lab and the patient.

**Peter Wilhoit** was a founding member of the MCCRF board of directors. He was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer at the age of 47. As a member of the board, he helped us reach out to the community. He loved his two children, Kaitlin and Jack, and his fiancé, Annette Hruby. He worked hard, but also knew how to enjoy life and spent much of his time on the St Croix River. Peter died on December 17, 2017, at the age of 51, four years after being diagnosed. The grant in his memory is to look for what Peter called “a game changer” in the treatment of colorectal cancer.

