



## How One Foundation Is Fast-Tracking HIV Research



BY: DAVID HEITZ  
FEBRUARY 18TH, 2016

They may not be the largest foundation dedicated to ending HIV, but The Campbell Foundation has a reputation for coming through when important research projects need a boost to continue their momentum.

And that is exactly what has happened with their latest “fast-track” grants – grants of \$30,000 each given to three projects that will examine a new way of attacking the virus, inhibit replication of HIV in T-cells, and explore the “real world feasibility and psychological impact” of PrEP among youths and sero-discordant couples.

“It’s called seed funding for a reason,” said Campbell Foundation Executive Director Ken Rapkin. “We provide the initial funding to get researchers’ work to flourish. Once they are able to achieve even small successes, scientists such as these three often are able to obtain significantly more funding to continue their work.”

Rapkin said that with South Florida having the dubious distinction of being the new epicenter of HIV in America, they chose this time to support some local researchers.

Dr. Massimo Caputi, associate professor of biomedical science at Florida Atlantic University’s Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, won a \$448,500 grant from the National Institutes of Health to further his work after getting started with the Campbell’s Foundation grant.

Caputi is experimenting with a cellular protein called SRSF1 to inhibit HIV replication in T-cells. “The three-year NIH grant [titled ‘Inhibition of HIV-1 replication by delivery for the SRSF1 RNA Recognition Motifs’](#) will allow me to expand on my previous HIV research,” Caputi said. “This research proposes to create a truncated version of SRSF1 in bacteria, purify it and deliver it to infected cells using cell-penetrating peptides with high efficiency. This approach will inhibit viral replication ex-vivo (in an experiment outside the human body) in lymphocytes purified from healthy donors and infected by a number of viral strains.”

A grant given to Dr. Mathias Lichtenheld, associate professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, funds a project where scientists examine how the very first cells infected with HIV have potential to

attack the virus, [according to a news release by The Campbell Foundation](#). “The results were so interesting and became applicable to HIV Cure Research that the State of Florida awarded Dr. Lichtenheld another \$100,000 to ‘drill down deeper.’”

Finally, Dr. Ana Puga and colleagues from the Children’s Diagnostic and Treatment Center’s Comprehensive Family AIDS Program in Fort Lauderdale used their grant to “conduct research which resulted in the finding that high-risk youth were generally unaware of PrEP,” according to the release. “A subsequent youth summit on the use of the drug was scheduled to increase general awareness. In addition, discussions also have taken place with the lead physician at the Centers for Disease Control, along with conversations with national field experts about this general lack of understanding and awareness of PrEP and what actions can be taken to improve awareness.”

The project hopes to expand its work via a grant from a major pharmaceutical company.