

AZ Insider: \$6.4M Grant to Test Dog Preventive Cancer Vaccine at ASU

Written by Kathy Shayna Shocket reports on the people who make difference.
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Many are applauding with six million THANK YOUS to the Open Philanthropy Project. That's because they awarded a \$6,421,402 (to be exact) to **Stephen Albert Johnston** at ASU Arizona State to support the largest interventional canine clinical trial ever conducted.

The trial will assess the effectiveness of a unique vaccine in preventing any type of cancer in dogs and will allow for 800 owners' pets (healthy middle aged dogs) to enroll in the clinical trials.

The experts at ASU say that cancer is the leading cause of death in pet dogs and their cancers are very similar to their human counterparts.

The new vaccine, called a multi-valent frameshift peptide (FSP) vaccine, was developed by Johnston and his team over the last ten years. "Our goal has always been, that if this is possible, we should at least try it," said Johnston, who directs the Biodesign Center for Innovations in Medicine. "Open Philanthropy was the only organization that responded to support our high-risk project, the biggest cancer intervention trial in dogs ever. I really admire them for that."

The vaccine already has been tested for efficacy in mice and is shown to be safe in dogs.

Johnston and his team eventually want to take the next leap and test the vaccine in humans. However, they feel that first testing the vaccine in dogs has many advantages. "We have been working over 10 years to develop a vaccine that could potentially prevent any cancer," said **Luhui Shen**, senior science director of the vaccine project.

The trial will be conducted under the direction of **Douglas Thamm**, director of clinical research at the Flint Animal Cancer Center at Colorado State University. Healthy, middle-aged pet dogs will be enrolled, continuing to live their normal lives at home and receiving biannual exams with a complete clinical pathology workup.

Any owner whose dog develops cancer during the trial, on either the test or control arm, will be given a credit toward medical expenses.

"It wasn't easy to identify an organization interested in funding such a trial," Johnston said. "Open Philanthropy came to us, rigorously reviewed our proposal and offered to fund the trial. We are extremely grateful that they would support this high-risk effort. This vaccine may not work, but if it does it will be thanks to the commitment of Open Philanthropy to funding potentially transformative efforts."



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