



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MDA FUNDS UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI GENETICIST TO FIND CAUSES OF SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY

TUCSON, Ariz., Aug. 23, 2011 — Lisa Baumbach, Ph.D., is in tenacious pursuit of a cure for [spinal muscular atrophy \(SMA\)](#) and has just been awarded a \$387,228 grant from the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) to continue her [search for novel genes](#) causing rare forms of infantile SMA. Baumbach is an associate professor of pediatrics and neurology at the Miller School of Medicine at the University of Miami. She also is the geneticist for the MDA Clinic at the University of Miami.

The new multiyear grant is one of [40 recently approved](#) by the MDA Board of Directors, following rigorous peer review by MDA's Medical and Scientific Advisory Committees involving the world's leading authorities on neuromuscular diseases. Continuing its rich tradition of being the largest nongovernmental source of neuromuscular disease research, MDA's total new grant investment exceeds \$13.7 million. Many of the new initiatives being funded by MDA will run through July 2014.

MDA Vice President of Research Sanjay Bidichandani, M.B.B.S., Ph.D., said "Dr. Baumbach's research aims to identify novel genes that cause more rare forms of SMA. It should yield valuable new clues for understanding disease pathogenesis and for advancing treatments for SMA."

"For nearly 20 years, MDA has continued to graciously award us support for research in the X-linked SMA field," Baumbach said. "We are indebted to MDA staff, to MDA supporters

and to the MDA Board of Directors for ongoing support, especially during critical times when funding for our project was especially challenging.”

SMA is a genetic disease that causes progressive muscle weakness in children. The infantile form of SMA (also known as [SMA type 1](#)) usually causes death before the age of two years because respiratory muscles can no longer support a child’s breathing.

The very rare X-linked SMA is unknowingly passed on to sons by their mothers, who are not themselves affected. Baumbach's research team was the first to identify UBE-1 as a gene that causes one of the X-linked forms of spinal muscular atrophy in infants.

With the new MDA grant, [Baumbach’s research](#) focuses on finding additional disease genes and biological pathways responsible for causing X-linked SMA. In addition, her team will search for potential genetic modifiers of the disease-causing genes.

MDA has supported Baumbach, her colleagues and their research into genes causing SMA in infants for her entire career.

About MDA

[MDA](#) is the nonprofit health agency dedicated to curing muscular dystrophy, ALS and related diseases by funding worldwide research. The Association also provides comprehensive health care and support services, advocacy and education. See MDA’s award-winning [“Make a Muscle, Make a Difference”® PSA](#).

In addition to funding more than 300 research projects worldwide, MDA maintains a national network of some 200 hospital-affiliated clinics; facilitates hundreds of support groups for families affected by neuromuscular diseases; and provides extraordinary local summer camp opportunities for thousands of youngsters fighting progressive muscle diseases. The Association is the first nonprofit to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Medical Association “for significant and lasting contributions to the health and welfare of humanity.”

In the Miami area, individuals living with neuromuscular diseases can receive excellent medical and health care services through the MDA Clinic at the University of Miami.

For more information about the Association and its programs, go to [mda.org](#).