



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine Presents  
Four Next Generation Fellowship Awards at the 2022 ACMG  
Annual Clinical Genetics Meeting**

**BETHESDA, MD – March 23, 2022** | Each year, the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine grants its **Next Generation Fellowship Awards** to promising early career professionals in a range of medical genetics and genomics specialties including Biochemical Genetics, and for the first time this year, Laboratory Genetics and Genomics and Ophthalmic Genetics. Support for this year's class of Fellows was generously provided by Bionano Genomics, Spark Therapeutics, Takeda, and Sanofi-Genzyme. The ACMG Foundation depends on corporate donations to support these and many other critical programs and thanks all the members of our Corporate Partners Program.

"There has never been a more exciting time in our field of genetic and genomic medicine, with new approaches to prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of rare and common disorders. The need for training the next generation of clinical and laboratory geneticists has never been greater, so we are especially grateful to Pfizer for their continuing support of the Next Generation Fellowship Award," said Bruce R. Korf, MD, PhD, FACMG, president of the ACMG Foundation.

**Medical Biochemical Genetics Subspecialty Fellowship Award:**

**Ibrahim Elsharkawi, MD/MB BCh BAO (NUI), Boston Children's Hospital**

Ibrahim Elsharkawi, MD/MB BCh BAO (NUI) is board-certified in pediatrics and medical genetics. He grew up among an international community in the Middle East and was fascinated by genetics at an early age. Dr. Elsharkawi attended a combined undergrad-medical school at a constituent of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland based in the Kingdom of Bahrain (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Bahrain), which provided him with a 'best of both worlds' approach to medicine. Following his graduation and completion of a general intern year, he worked for two years in research at the genetics division at Massachusetts General Hospital, followed by a four-year combined residency in pediatrics and medical genetics at Washington University in St. Louis. During his training, he found a deep passion for biochemical genetics, encompassing mitochondrial medicine. Dr. Elsharkawi is currently completing a one-year fellowship in Mitochondrial Medicine at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), to be followed by a one-year Medical Biochemical Genetics fellowship at Boston Children's Hospital, to aid in his quest to become a biochemical geneticist who is able to provide holistic, comprehensive care to patients with rare diseases in a rapidly evolving era of medical genetics.

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“I am absolutely thrilled to have been given this prestigious award by the ACMG Foundation, which will allow me the opportunity to build on what I am learning during my current Mitochondrial Medicine fellowship and to carry it forward into my Medical Biochemical Genetics fellowship. My dream of becoming a medical geneticist in the USA began when I first set foot in the USA in 2013 as a visiting medical student rotating at Massachusetts General Hospital. Since then, I have been so fortunate to have embarked on an incredible journey that has taken me to various parts of the country I now call my home, benefiting from tremendous mentorship and meaningful patient interactions that have shepherded me to my current passions in inborn errors of metabolism. We are all in this for our patients, and I am truly thankful for this opportunity to build and grow as a biochemical geneticist, to better serve our patients and their caregivers,” said Dr. Elsharkawi upon receiving the ACMG Foundation Next Generation Award.

### **Jessica Priestley, MD, PhD, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia**

Jessica Priestley, MD, PhD is presently completing her combined Pediatrics/Medical Genetics training at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, where she is a chief resident. She will remain at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia for her Medical Biochemical Fellowship next year. She earned her PhD in Physiology from the Medical College of Wisconsin, where she was awarded the Summa Cum Laude Prize in Physiology. She earned her MD from the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University where she was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha and Gold Humanism honor societies. She has authored 11 peer-reviewed publications, an editorial, and two book chapters. Dr. Priestley looks forward to a clinical practice in biochemical genetics that both satisfies her passion for patient/family-centered care and her curiosity about how to provide optimal care for patients with rare disease.

Upon receiving the ACMG Foundation Next Generation Award, Dr. Priestley said, “I am delighted and honored by the support the ACMG Foundation Next Generation Award provides for both my professional development and research interests in providing high-quality genetic care to diverse populations. I am grateful to the selection committee for this recognition, my team of mentors throughout my training who have served as role models and fostered my sense of curiosity, especially Dr. Rebecca Ganetzky, my inspiring patients and their families, and my own family, especially my daughter Rosalyn.”

### **Laboratory Genetics and Genomics Fellowship Award:**

#### **Nikhil Sahajpal, PhD, Greenwood Genetic Center**

Nikhil Sahajpal, PhD is a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Pathology, Augusta University, GA. Dr. Sahajpal completed his PhD from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, India in 2020 where his doctoral research work was on “understanding the pathophysiology of diabetic retinopathy.” Dr. Sahajpal has been the recipient of several international awards, including the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Senior Research

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Fellowship (DECRF) award by the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (2017) and the second-place best technologist award at the Annual Cancer Genomics Consortium meeting for two consecutive years (2020 and 2021). He has published 35 manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals utilizing various molecular and cytogenetic methodologies for prenatal, postnatal, and hematological malignancies. As the world struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Sahajpal played a key role in establishing COVID-19 FDA-EUA approved diagnostic testing and research at Augusta University and is a key contributor of the COVID-19 host genome SV consortium. Dr. Sahajpal starts his ABMGG LGG fellowship at the ACGME accredited program at the Greenwood Genetic Center in July 2022.

Dr. Sahajpal said upon receiving the award, "As an incumbent ABMGG LGG fellow at the Greenwood Genetic Center (GGC) in Greenwood, SC, I feel delighted and honored to receive this prestigious Next Generation Fellowship and Training Award from the ACMG Foundation. I am humbled by this amazing opportunity given to me by the selection committee of the ACMG Foundation to further my career development in the field of laboratory genetics and genomics at the GGC. I am proud to be part of the ACMG community as I start my fellowship at the GGC to become a laboratory Director to advance clinical diagnostic testing and support patients and families affected with genetic disorders."

#### **Ophthalmic Genetics Fellowship Award:**

##### **Emile Vieta, MD, University of California at Los Angeles - Jules Stein Eye Institute**

Emile Vieta, MD graduated Magna Cum Laude in Chemistry from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. After graduate studies in Physical Chemistry, he completed his medical degree with distinction from the San Juan Bautista School of Medicine. His interest in research motivated him to pursue a Post-doctoral Fellowship at the Pediatric, Developmental, and Genetic Ophthalmology Section at the National Eye Institute in NIH, under Dr. Brian P. Brooks. He has been active in international medical missions to several countries and enjoys traveling and dancing salsa. As the first EyeSTAR Genetics trainee, Emile will undertake training in both Ophthalmology and Medical Genetics at the University of California at Los Angeles. After residency, he plans to pursue a Pediatric Ophthalmology Fellowship with the ultimate goal of returning to Puerto Rico to work as a clinician and a researcher.

"It is truly an honor to receive this award. I would like to wholeheartedly thank my family, my co-workers, my mentors, the ACMG, and the ACMGF. It is a privilege to learn and work in this field as well as to have the support of such wonderful mentors. I look forward to the work ahead," said Dr. Vieta upon receiving the award.

#### **About the ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine**

The ACMG Foundation for Genetic and Genomic Medicine, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is a community of supporters and contributors who understand the importance of medical genetics and genomics in healthcare. Established in 1992,

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the ACMG Foundation supports the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) mission to “translate genes into health.” Through its work, the ACMG Foundation fosters charitable giving, promotes training opportunities to attract future medical geneticists and genetic counselors to the field, shares information about medical genetics and genomics, and sponsors important research. To learn more and support the ACMG Foundation mission to create “Better Health through Genetics” visit [www.acmgfoundation.org](http://www.acmgfoundation.org).

**Note to editors:** To arrange interviews with experts in medical genetics and genomics, contact ACMG Senior Director of Public Relations Kathy Moran, MBA at [kmoran@acmg.net](mailto:kmoran@acmg.net).

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