

## Unveiling the Future of Research and Innovation

### Versiti Blood Research Institute breaks ground on building expansion

Versiti Blood Research Institute (VBRI) is a catalyst of medical innovation, bringing together some of the brightest minds in research to better understand blood diseases and find more effective treatments. For more than 75 years, our discoveries have shaped the practice of medicine and impacted scientific thinking across disciplines.

On Tuesday, Sept. 10, we officially broke ground on our building expansion project, ushering in a new era of innovation.

Expanding and enhancing our facility will give our scientists the tools they need to grow with purpose and improve the lives of patients around the world.

“As researchers, our finest moments often occur in collaboration—here in Wauwatosa and globally—translating data into more effective, better-tolerated patient care,” said VBRI Executive Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer Michael Deininger, MD, PhD. “With this expansion, VBRI reaffirms its commitment to fostering such rigorous scholarship and discovery.”

“Blood conditions like leukemia, thrombosis, sickle cell disease and hemophilia affect communities everywhere,” said Versiti President and CEO Chris Miskel. “Expanding our research will drive groundbreaking treatments for these conditions, leading to better health outcomes for countless individuals.”

The VBRI expansion project is expected to be completed in 2026 and will attract top scientific talent, bringing jobs, educational opportunities and economic growth to the region.



Versiti President and CEO  
Chris Miskel

---

# Versiti participates in successful clinical trial for new treatment for children with hemophilia A

Lynn Malec, MD, MSc, medical director at Versiti Comprehensive Center for Bleeding Disorders (CCBD) and associate investigator at Versiti Blood Research Institute (VBRI) was recently published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* as part of a clinical trial that studied the efficacy of a new treatment for children with severe hemophilia A.

Hemophilia A affects 1 in every 5,000 male births and is characterized by a deficiency of the blood protein factor VIII (FVIII), which is essential for the formation of blood clots. Many patients receive FVIII infusions to replace the protein their blood lacks; however, these treatments have notoriously short half-lives, requiring patients to re-infuse frequently to prevent spontaneous bleeds.

“Although we have seen significant innovation in the hemophilia treatment space in the last decade, there is a need for patients to have access to therapies that will optimally protect them from joint and other bleeding events throughout their lifetimes, while also minimizing the burden of treatment,” Dr. Malec said.

In February 2023, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved efanesoctocog alfa, a prophylactic drug used to reduce the number of bleeding episodes in adult males with severe hemophilia A. Following this success, a pediatric clinical trial was launched to better understand how patients under age 12 would respond to the medication.

Versiti CCBD, a federally designated hemophilia treatment center, had the highest number of patients enrolled in the pediatric study for efanesoctocog alfa. At the conclusion of the year-long trial, researchers found no evidence of neutralizing antibodies to FVIII, inhibitors or anti-drug antibodies, indicating that taking efanesoctocog alfa weekly is a highly effective treatment for protecting children with hemophilia A against bleeding.

Participation in this clinical trial marks a full-circle moment for Versiti CCBD, a top-class hemophilia treatment center that counts both a clinical team and research team among its staff. “My patients who were enrolled in the study all chose to continue to receive the therapy after the conclusion of the study, by receiving this medication as a prescription,” Dr. Malec said. “Offering this study to patients at Versiti, and now the availability of this prescribable medication to patients at CCBD, furthers my ability to offer patients state-of-the-art care. As I partner with patients and families to make treatment decisions, having medications such as efanesoctocog alfa strengthens my ability to offer options that can contribute to more optimized health. It makes all the hard work of being a site participating in the study worth the effort.”



| Lynn Malec, MD, MSc

---

## Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Career Development Award

Congratulations to Senior Research Scientist **Nataly Cruz, PhD**, who was recently awarded \$150,000 as part of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Career Development Award. These funds will support Dr. Cruz as she studies the role of the metabolic regulator SIRT5 in acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL).



| Nataly Cruz, PhD

# Versiti Blood Research Institute trainees awarded prestigious Chateaubriand STEM fellowships

In summer 2024, two Versiti Blood Research Institute (VBRI) doctoral students, Emily Boyd, MS, and Mindy Kim, were awarded prestigious Chateaubriand STEM Fellowships that will take them to France to study with research teams connected to laboratories at VBRI.



A fourth-year graduate student at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW), Emily Boyd, MS, studies platelet and megakaryocyte biology in the laboratory of VBRI Investigator Hervé Falet, PhD. In October, she will travel to Strasbourg, France, to work in the

laboratory of Anita Eckly, PhD, a researcher whose work coincides with Boyd's. "The next step is to bring all the skills I learn over there and apply them to my project here and finish my dissertation, as well as maintain a partnership with Dr. Eckly and her cohort," Boyd said.



Mindy Kim is part of an MD/PhD program at MCW and studies bile acids in the lab of VBRI Associate Investigator Ze Zheng, MBBS, PhD. This winter, Kim will travel to Normandy, France, where she will work alongside experts while continuing to collaborate

with Dr. Zheng's lab at VBRI. "My project will look at the potentially novel role of bile acids and atherosclerotic cardiovascular diseases. I will delve into the context of atherosclerosis, which can be related to myocardial infarction and strokes," she said. "Some of the work that I do in the lab will be presented in lab meetings at VBRI, and I will still receive feedback and questions that are helpful for research. It will stimulate a stronger connection and collaboration between the two labs."

## Community Beacon of Hope State of Wisconsin

Versiti Blood Research Institute's building expansion would not be possible without the State of Wisconsin's Joint Finance Committee, which approved a \$10 million grant to support the project. The investment from the state is part of a \$63.5 million project that will create more than 100 new jobs, generate an estimated \$19 million in additional tax revenue for the state over 30 years, and by 2050, is expected to have an economic impact of more than half a billion dollars.



## Upcoming Events

### Vampire Ball

**Date:** Friday, Oct. 25, 2024

**Time:** 6-11 p.m.

**Location:** Wisconsin Club | 900 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53233

Hosted by Versiti Blood Research Institute's Junior Advisory Board

Register





8733 W Watertown Plank Road,  
PO Box 26576, Milwaukee, WI 53226



# BRightLights

BRightLights is a quarterly newsletter published by the Versiti Blood Research Institute Foundation. Interested in learning more? Please contact the Foundation office: 414-937-6799.