



Giving Traction to Great Ideas

Iris and Andy Morse

For Andy Morse, Yale College Class of 1968, his pride in his alma mater and a lifelong curiosity about scientific research led to admiration and support of the vital work of Yale Cancer Center.

Managing Director of the Morse, Towey & White Group at Hightower Investments, a wealth management firm in Manhattan, Mr. Morse has travelled widely during his finance career. He sits on the Board of Governors of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel. The Institute's mission to advance science for the benefit of humanity mirrors that of Yale Cancer Center.

"Yale is one of those magical places, and there aren't many of them, that has tremendous intellect and heart, which are strikingly evident at its Cancer Center," said Mr. Morse. He serves on the Cancer Center's Advisory Board, a group of volunteers who

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assist the Center in achieving its goals and objectives.

He applauds the Center’s unwavering commitment to patient care and science, citing its move at the pandemic’s beginning to relocate Smilow Cancer Hospital patients to other Yale hospital facilities to accommodate patients with COVID-19 in need of care.

“When I first started talking with the Center’s staff, I was bowled over by their sense of urgency for the mission and extraordinary devotion to both research and clinical care,” said Mr. Morse. “They are not just smart men and women; they are decent, astounding people from countless countries and walks of life. The Center’s urgent response was both elegant and seamless.”

Yale Cancer Center, laser focused on its mission and abiding desire to help people, inspired Mr. Morse and his wife Iris, a long-time cancer survivor. The couple established the Iris and Andrew Morse Fund for Cancer Research..

Driven by Mr. Morse’s interest in the microbiome and Mrs. Morse’s desire to support the life sciences, in its first year, the Fund will focus on Yale Cancer Center researchers investigating the microbiome’s role in cancer development, growth, and treatment.

Host to bacteria, parasites, fungi and viruses known as microbiota or microbes, a healthy microbiome helps the human

body function and develop immunity against disease. Recently, a growing body of research has begun exploring the impact of the microbiome—often considered an organ because it is so essential for certain diseases and their treatment, including cancer.

“We’re seeing that trillions of bacteria and other microorganisms throughout our body may stimulate cancer formation,” said Yale Cancer Center Deputy Director, Daniel DiMaio, MD, PhD, Waldemar Von Zedtwitz Professor of Genetics and Professor of Molecular Biophysics, Biochemistry and of Therapeutic Radiology. “In addition, the microbiome clearly affects the effectiveness of treatments like immunotherapies and chemotherapies on certain cancers for certain people.”

In Fall 2021, the Morse Fund will support two to three internal pilot grants for studies on the interplay between the microbiome and cancer. “This is a relatively new area,” said Dr. DiMaio. “Yale has a few people working on it, but we’re really at the starting line. Andy and Iris’s support will jumpstart new areas of research.”

In science, funding at the earliest stages of investigation is vital to springboard new discoveries. The National Institutes of Health and other large institutions typically fund studies when they are more well developed—

when, Dr. DiMaio said, essentially many of the answers are already known. The Morses wanted to go where larger funders traditionally don’t.

“Andy asked from the beginning what would be most useful,” said Dr. DiMaio. “And the pilot funding is always vital. A lot of really good ideas have difficulty gaining traction because they are risky. When we have flexible funds, we can try risky things that may someday lead to important breakthroughs.”

On Mr. Morse’s part, his comfort with such risks goes back to curiosity and trust in people and process: “With any great advance or discovery, you’ve got to give people room to make it happen. The Yale Cancer Center team has a strong sense of virtue and commerce. They want to develop breakthrough drugs for cancer. They make no bones about it, and it’s all for a good reason. This is the type of risk I am proud to get behind. I always encourage my Yale classmates to approach giving in the same way.”

Said Dr. DiMaio of Mr. Morse’s perspective, “Andy is successful because he is a risk taker, a visionary. He’s a fantastic example of how one person can influence a broader understanding of cancer and lead to better treatments and outcomes.”