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## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **Acclaimed Geneticist Finds Basis of Alopecia Areata**

*Member of National Alopecia Areata Foundation Scientific Advisory Council Answers Key Questions on one of the Most Prevalent Autoimmune Diseases*

SAN RAFAEL- On June 30, 2010, Nature Journal, the weekly, international, interdisciplinary journal of science, published an article that unveils the most exciting genetic research on alopecia areata to date. Led by the National Alopecia Areata Foundation Scientific Advisory Council member Dr. Angela Christiano, and using cases from the National Alopecia Areata Registry, a team of investigators from Columbia University Medical Center have found eight genes that contribute to alopecia areata, one of which has a possible role in the onset of the disease.

Alopecia (AL-OH-PEE-SHA) areata (AIR-EE-AH-TAH) is an autoimmune skin disease that may result in total or partial loss of hair. Affecting over 5 million Americans, alopecia areata currently has no cure, and no treatment that works across the board. Part of the significance of this recent finding is that many of the genes found to be associated with alopecia areata are also associated with other autoimmune diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes and celiac disease; all autoimmune diseases with pre-existing treatments. This discovery, therefore, is expected to lead to effective clinical trials. “Finally, we have the possibility of developing drugs that specifically target the mechanism behind the disease,” adds Dr. Christiano.

“This research is very exciting as alopecia areata affects a huge number of people worldwide, and there are very few treatments for it-resulting in an enormous unmet medical need,” said Vicki Kalabokes, president and CEO of the National Alopecia Areata Foundation, which has funded Dr. Christiano for the past 13 consecutive years. “Hair loss creates daily life issues, especially for children who experience social stigma. It affects their quality of life and can lead to long-term psychosocial impact.”

Contributing to the emotional impact of alopecia areata is the nature of the disease itself. Alopecia areata is a cyclical disease having bald patches appear and, in most cases grow back, only to appear again. In many instances, the bald patches can progress to a more extreme, yet rare, form of the disease, alopecia totalis which is total scalp hair loss or alopecia universalis, resulting in the total loss of all body hair. Included in Dr. Christiano’s discovery, however, is the ability to now predict with

accuracy the progression of the disease in a patient. Using the number of genes associated with disease as the marker, a genetic test has been created that can indicate the severity of disease. For the patient, this means that one will be able to determine the likelihood of their bald patch progressing to complete body hair loss.

The National Alopecia Areata Registry (NAAF), a patient registry which has been funded by the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases at the National Institutes of Health since 2000, provided the 1,054 cases, collected from NAAR centers across the United States for this research. Along with these cases, over 3200 controls were also used. “The advantage of this large sample size is that we can be sure that this group of genes was identified with a high statistical significance and did not happen by chance,” said Dr. Christiano. “The next step is to replicate this study in future research.”

The National Alopecia Areata Foundation (NAAF), headquartered in San Rafael, CA. supports research to find a cure or acceptable treatment for alopecia areata, supports those with the disease, and educates the public about alopecia areata. NAAF is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and a prestigious Scientific Advisory Council. Founded in 1981, NAAF is widely regarded as the largest, most influential and most representative foundation associated with alopecia areata.

To learn more about Dr. Christiano’s research, and its implications, please visit the National Alopecia Areata Foundation website at [www.naaf.org](http://www.naaf.org).

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