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**Virginia Catalyst and the Commonwealth Health Research Board Awards \$300,000 Grant to Study Severe Liver Disease**

*Grant aims to fund joint research among Sanyal Biotechnology, Eastern Virginia Medical School and George Mason University.*

RICHMOND, VA – July 27, 2017 – Virginia Biosciences Health Research Corporation, now known as Virginia Catalyst, and the Commonwealth Health Research Board (CHRB) have partnered to award a \$300,000 grant to a team from Sanyal Biotechnology, Eastern Virginia Medical School and George Mason University.

The grant aims to help accelerate the commercialization of Sanyal Biotechnology’s innovative DIAMOND™ mouse model, which is being commercialized for preclinical assessment of therapeutic agents for non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), a severe liver disease that can lead to fibrosis, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Virginia Catalyst will provide \$100,000 in funding while CHRB will provide \$200,000. Sanyal Biotechnology is investing \$166,000 as matching funds for the project titled, “Characterization of GUT Microbiome and Liver Cell Populations to Accelerate Commercialization of the DIAMOND™ Mouse Model.”

“Virginia Catalyst is pleased to partner with the CHRB to jointly fund a collaborative research project among EVMS, GMU and Sanyal Biotechnology designed to develop enhanced care for Virginians suffering with liver disease,” said David X. Cifu, MD, Associate Dean of Innovation and System Integration, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, and Virginia Catalyst Board Chairman. “These two, state-coordinated, research funding programs have mandates to promote academic partnerships, private-public collaborations and research initiatives that grow and support industry and jobs in the Commonwealth and improve the health of Virginia’s citizens, respectively. This unique co-funding by the two programs to accelerate the commercialization of this promising animal research model represents an important next step in collaboration across state agencies in an effort to promote Virginia as a leading research center.”

A high-fat, high-sugar Western diet can lead to insulin resistance, obesity, fatty liver and NASH in humans. The DIAMOND™ mice model naturally develops NASH in response to a high-fat, high-sugar Western diet. The disease progression in the DIAMOND™ mice parallels human disease progression, to

the histopathology. The grant will help Sanyal Biotechnology to carry out a longitudinal natural history study on a cohort of 600 DIAMOND™ mice and harvest tissues and fluids at one-month intervals for the development of a tissue bank. Sanyal Biotechnology will also aim to characterize molecular and cellular changes in live liver cell preparations from the DIAMOND™ mice at one-month intervals by cell sorting and flow cytometry.

The grant funds will support the hiring of Sanyal Biotechnology employees and provide partial support for salaries of technicians and staff at Eastern Virginia Medical School and George Mason University. The schools are expected to use the data collected during the studies for National Institutes of Health grant applications.

### *Supporting Quotes*

“The Virginia Catalyst grant will allow us to accelerate commercialization of our mouse model. By funding development of a tissue bank, the grant allows us to share biological research materials with prospective customers so that they can determine if our model will be useful in their preclinical research programs. Being able to test tissues in their own labs gives prospective customers confidence in our new mouse model. We have already closed several sales as a result of sharing banked tissues supported by this grant. We are creating jobs as a result of the investment; we have recently hired a scientist and technician onto our team to help carry out the studies.”

**–Rebecca Caffrey, PhD, MBA, CLP, Founder and CEO, Sanyal Biotechnology**

“CHRB is pleased to collaborate with the Virginia Catalyst to jointly-fund this research project with the goal of supporting Virginia’s core bioscience strengths, improving human health, demonstrating commercial viability and creating new companies and jobs in Virginia. We are excited about this innovative partnership between our two organizations which allows for collaboration between researchers from public institutions of higher education and private industry partners who can work together to maximize human health benefits for the citizens of the Commonwealth and promote Virginia’s standing as a leader in scientific and medical research.”

**–Cynda A. Johnson, MD, MBA, Chair, Commonwealth Health Research Board**

### **About Virginia Catalyst**

The mission of Virginia Biosciences Health Research Corporation (VBHRC), known as Virginia Catalyst, is to advance life sciences throughout Virginia as a means of addressing large unmet medical needs to improve human health and to create high-paying jobs throughout the Commonwealth. Funded by the Virginia General Assembly’s General fund, the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Tech, Eastern Virginia Medical School, George Mason University, Old Dominion University, and William and Mary, Virginia Catalyst has funding opportunities to support collaborative projects in the Commonwealth and is home to the Virginia Neuroscience Initiative. For more information, visit [www.virginiacatalyst.org](http://www.virginiacatalyst.org).

### **About the Commonwealth Health Research Board**

The Commonwealth Health Research Board (CHRB) was created by Virginia Code §32.1-162.23 to provide financial support, in the form of grants, donations, or other assistance, for research efforts that have the potential of maximizing human health benefits for the citizens of the Commonwealth. Research efforts eligible for support by the Board include traditional medical and biomedical research relating to the causes and cures of diseases as well as research related to health services and the delivery of health care. Since its inception in 1999, the CHRB has funded 202 research grants totaling almost \$16.5 million.

The CHRB encourages collaborative research efforts among two or more institutions or organizations, gives priority to those research efforts where Board support can be leveraged to foster contributions from federal agencies or other entities, and supports both new research efforts and the expansion or continuation of existing research efforts. CHRB grant recipients of grant awards from the CHRB's inception to date have leveraged over \$32 million in additional private and federal grant funds to further their research studies. For more information, visit [www.chrb.org](http://www.chrb.org)

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