



**2023 Annual Report**  
**SHOULDER to**  
**SHOULDER**

**Dear Friends of the Autoimmunity Institute:**

For as long as autoimmunity has been recognized, these systemic diseases have been treated in silos. When care is not thoughtfully centralized, diagnosis is delayed, treatment is interrupted, and patients don't receive the support they so urgently need.

The Autoimmunity Institute is a destination for coordinated, multidisciplinary care. We house multiple specialties under one roof, so physicians can collaborate to provide an individualized path forward for every unique patient. And then there's the power of our team-based care: clinicians who act as an extension of our specialty providers to address every aspect of a person's holistic health, especially the barriers that get in the way of healing.

The Autoimmunity Institute offers the expertise of world-renowned thought leaders in medicine. Their answer to a siloed approach which doesn't serve patients is just the opposite: working shoulder to shoulder to deliver care. It's how we diagnose, monitor, and treat our patients, how we educate our early-career trainees, and how we conduct groundbreaking research that brings us closer to a cure for these complex diseases.

To all of our partners: thank you for working shoulder to shoulder with us to make this care paradigm possible for our patients.



DAWN WEIDENHOFF, HEALTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR; JOSEPH AHEARN, MD, AUTOIMMUNITY INSTITUTE CHAIR



JOSEPH AHEARN, MD, CHAIR

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ON THE COVER: ZAINA SHAHID, MD, FELLOW;  
ADAM DORE, DO, RHEUMATOLOGY DIVISION CHIEF

SELECT IMAGES BY RICHARD KELLY PHOTOGRAPHY

# Shoulder to Shoulder

## *Patient Satisfaction*

There's a reason it's called a doctor's visit. Our patients are our guests, and we are serious about hosting an outstanding patient experience. One of our golden rules is to walk with the patient – never in front or behind. Shoulder to shoulder, we are always on the patient's side.

Based on the results of our patient exit surveys in 2023:

**97%** of patients answered they were *likely or extremely likely to refer a patient to us for care.*

**98%** of patients answered that they were *satisfied or extremely satisfied with their visit.*

**100%** of patients agreed that *the Autoimmunity Institute is an inclusive environment where everyone is welcomed.*

SUSAN MANZI, MD, MPH, DIRECTOR, LUPUS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



# Shoulder to Shoulder *Care*

When a disease causes multi-organ involvement, a patient needs multidisciplinary care. That's why the AHN Autoimmunity Institute was created in 2018, assembling various medical specialists in one place to merge resources and efforts and provide the best care possible for every patient. Once we built this one-stop shop, we asked: why see patients back to back when we can see them shoulder to shoulder?



# The Center for Interstitial Lung Disease

Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD) triggered by autoimmunity often has multi-organ involvement. That's why the new Center for ILD allows patients to meet with rheumatologist Dr. Joanna Marco together with pulmonologist Dr. Briana DiSilvio. They each bring their own skill set to the room, but they always see eye to eye on patient care.

## Why launch this center of excellence?

**Briana DiSilvio, MD:** We realized that these patients require true multi-disciplinary input, which is hard to do if patients are seeing two separate providers. There can be communication challenges, delays between pulmonology and rheumatology visits months down the line, interruption in treatment decisions. We recognized that there was an opportunity here to bring the invested parties together.

## How do you work shoulder to shoulder?

**Joanna Marco, MD:** If a patient says

they're having trouble walking up the stairs, together we're figuring out, is that because their lungs are acting up? Is it because their arthritis is bad? Usually specialists have to coordinate time to put their heads together, but we're discussing workup and treatment options in real time.

**BD:** This model allows us to get patients on the right track for therapy more quickly, to recognize success in treatment—or failures in treatment—earlier, with opportunities for treatment alteration sooner. None of this can happen if patients spend six months to a year playing catch up with their providers.

## ILD RESEARCH

In 2023 AHN successfully enrolled in two Phase III, double blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trials to address the unmet needs of patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and other forms of progressive fibrosing ILDs.

"Usually specialists have to coordinate time to put their heads together, but we're discussing workup and treatment options in real time."

—  
Joanna Marco, MD

## What is the benefit of housing this center in the Autoimmunity Institute?

**JM:** These are rare manifestations of rare diseases, so some physicians might see cases only a couple of times a year and might not be as comfortable taking care of these patients. It's huge boon for there to be a clinic where we see these rare lung diseases on a frequent basis.

**BD:** Going back and forth between providers, waiting for treatment decisions to be made—all of that is an emotional burden on patients. We work to eliminate that and to let them know we're on the same team. I don't think there's anything more comforting for a patient with a complex disease than knowing their care partners are on the same journey.



JOANNA MARCO, MD AND BRIANA DISILVIO, MD

# The Center for Autoimmune Kidney Disease

Some call it a shoulder to shoulder clinic. Rheumatologist Sonia Manocha, MD, and nephrologist Swati Arora, MD call it co-parenting. The two physicians work compatibly to address the multi-organ involvement of autoimmune kidney disease at this center of excellence launched in 2023.

## Why launch this center of excellence?

**Swati Arora, MD:** We're able to see the patients together, go over all of the nuances, the nephrology aspects as well as the rheumatology aspects, and in real time go over treatment options. Before the clinic was officially launched, sometimes we would try to see patients back-to-back. But the interaction that happens when we are physically in the same room with the patient and their family...it fuels such a fruitful discussion. It's almost like solving

that puzzle right away. With Dr. Manocha's support we've taken care of it instead of postponing care. It goes both ways: the patients like that we're not leaving them *in the middle of*. They always hear "someone will get back to you". With the clinic, that "someone factor" goes away.

## How do you work shoulder to shoulder?

**SA:** One sitting, one standing!

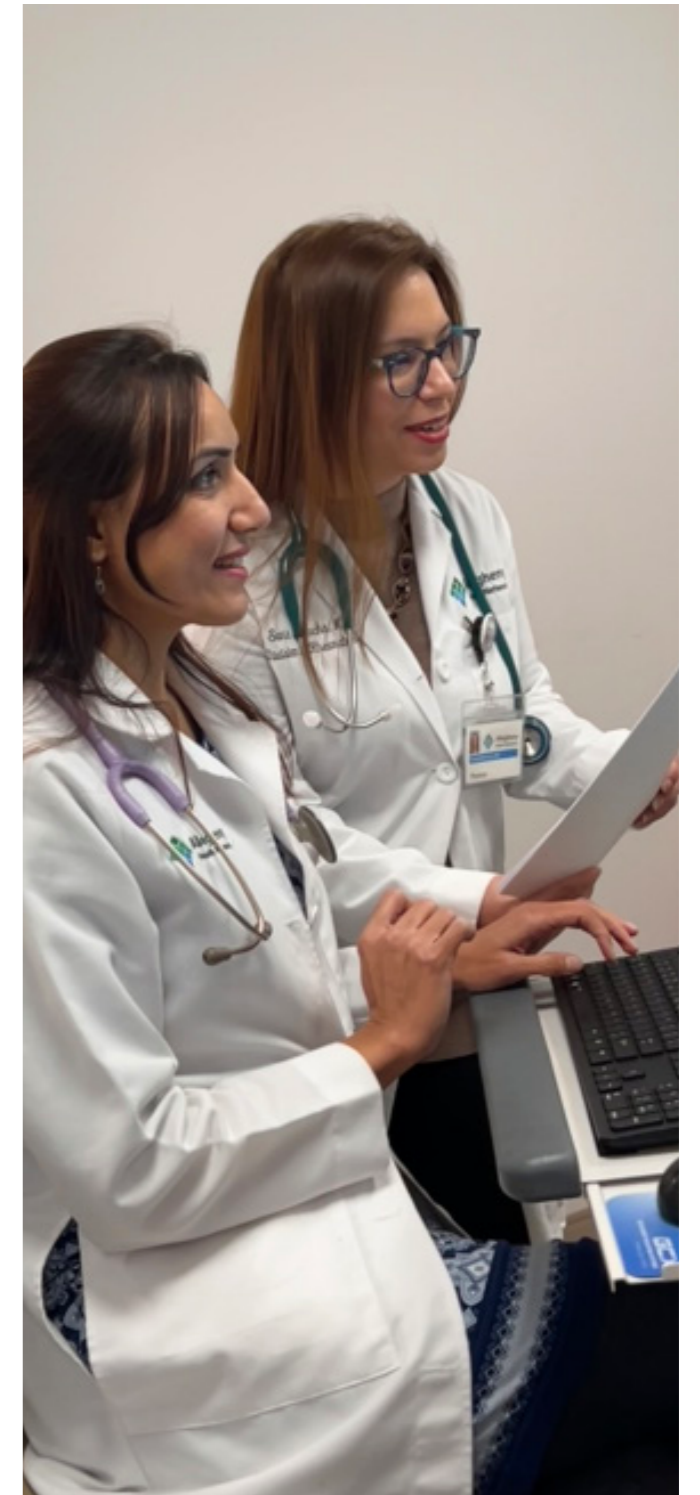
**Sonia Manocha, MD:** And still the same height! It's a wonderful streamline of

communication. With the two of us together in the room, it's a very different interaction versus talking afterwards. We can play off of each other and make things more comprehensive for the patient.

**SA:** Our personalities are very similar. We like to focus but keep it lighthearted and joke around—it eases the stress for the patient. More than "managing," I call this co-parenting: the nephrology parent and the rheumatology parent. We're here to take care of you and come up with a plan as a team.

## What is the benefit of housing this center in the Autoimmunity Institute?

**SM:** Because this is all within the Autoimmunity Institute space, we have the option to reach out to other folks. If we're starting a new medication, we have our clinical pharmacist right there on board to help. There's a lot of support within that realm.



SWATI ARORA, MD AND SONIA MANOCHA, MD

"Patients always hear, 'someone will get back to you.' With the GN clinic, that 'someone factor' goes away."

—  
Swati Arora, MD

# Shoulder to Shoulder *Transformation*

Fighting autoimmunity is a team sport. The cumulative impact of team-based care can be greater than any one intervention alone. In medicine, we see this type of synergy working with polypharmacy. At the Autoimmunity Institute, we also see this synergy working with our people: patients feel better when their providers come together to synchronize care.



HEALTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATORS DAWN WEIDENHOFF (FAR LEFT) AND SENNAYA SPELL (FAR RIGHT); KRISTEN SEYDEL, LPN

## HEAR OUR STORY

Listen to Dr. Joseph Ahearn, MD, Autoimmunity Institute Chair, describe our mission on [AHN MedTalks Podcast](#).



The Care Transformation Team acts as an extension of our specialty providers. With the expertise and perspective of a nurse navigator, nutritionist, pharmacist, and behavioral health consultant, this team works shoulder to shoulder to quarterback personalized health coaching that treats not just the disease, but the patient living with it.



CLOCKWISE: SUSAN MANZI, MD, MPH; CASSIE DOLECKI, PHARM.D; BRIAN GILDEA, BSN, RN-BC, NURSE NAVIGATOR; REBECCA YETISKUL, LCSW, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONSULTANT; CHELSEA ROURKE, REGISTERED DIETICIAN

The Autoimmunity Institute Care Transformation Team is vital to the way we work. This forward-thinking model has been so successful within autoimmunity that AHN is currently working to expand team-based care throughout the entire health system.

RHEUMATOLOGY FELLOWS ZAINA SHAHID, CONOR O'DONNELL, SALONI GOYAL, SARAH SHAHID; MICHAEL LUCKE, MD, FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM DIRECTOR





# Shoulder to Shoulder *Education*

The Autoimmunity Institute offers a fellowship program for early-career rheumatologists looking to develop a depth of knowledge in immune-mediated conditions. Our fellowship program is special because trainees work shoulder to shoulder with not just experienced rheumatologists, but with all of the 17+ specialities that call the Autoimmunity Institute home. Equipped with this learning experience, graduates of the program matriculate to practices and health care systems across the country, sharing our collaborative approach with as many patients as possible.

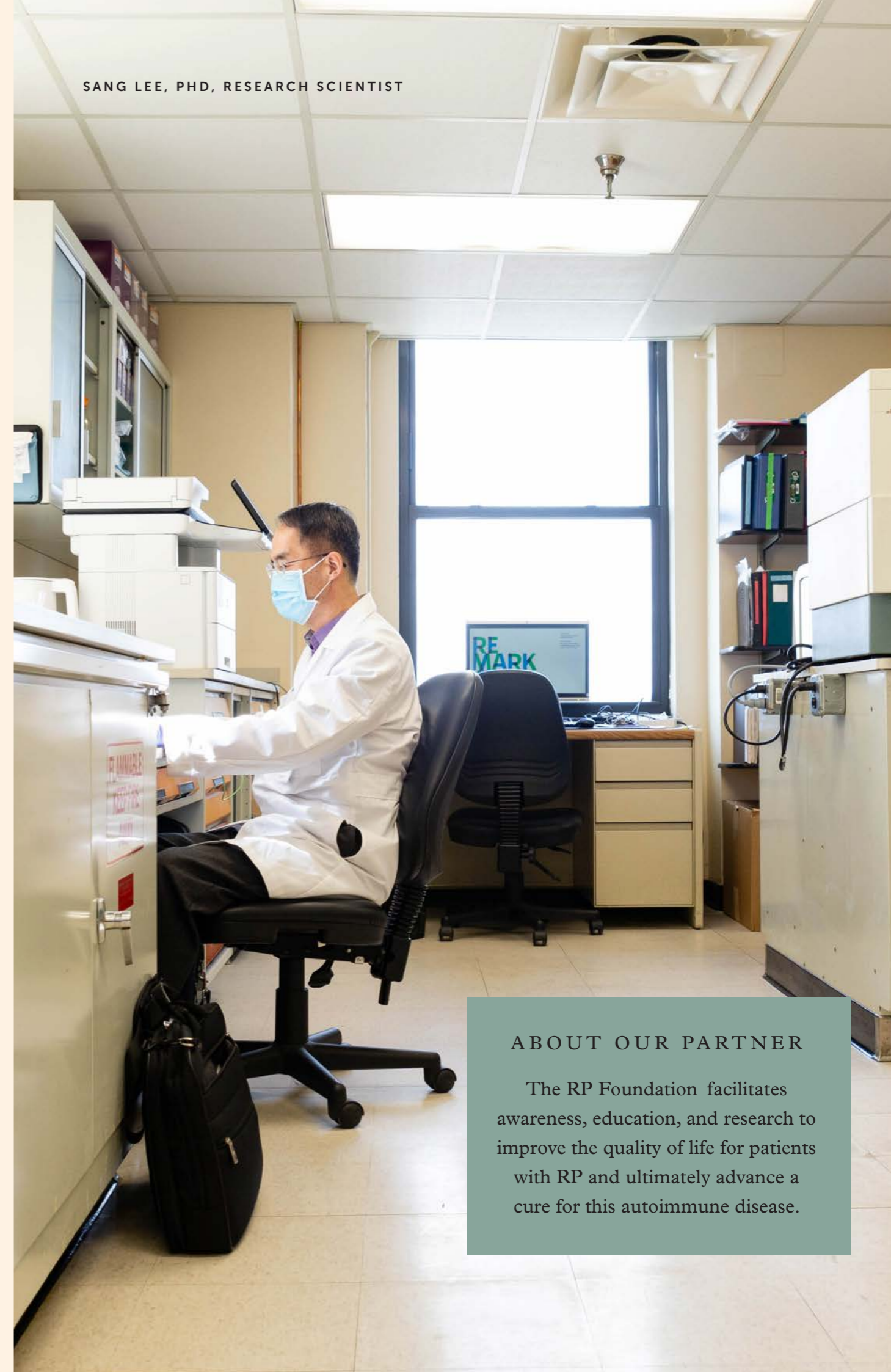


SARAH SHAHID, MD, FELLOW; SUSAN WARD,  
SENIOR MEDICAL ASSISTANT

# Shoulder to Shoulder *Research*

The AHN Autoimmunity Institute has been working shoulder to shoulder with the Relapsing Polychondritis (RP) Foundation for several years to launch PURPOSE (Patients' Universal Relapsing Polychondritis Open Specimen Endeavor). PURPOSE is the first direct-to-patient initiative to advance research on RP, a rare disease that effects the cartilage, in a major effort to discover improved diagnostic tests and treatments. It is the first and only of its kind—an unprecedented initiative that collects samples from participants wherever they are.

SANG LEE, PHD, RESEARCH SCIENTIST



## ABOUT OUR PARTNER

The RP Foundation facilitates awareness, education, and research to improve the quality of life for patients with RP and ultimately advance a cure for this autoimmune disease.



The PURPOSE Biobank has the potential to deepen the current understanding not only of RP, but of other autoimmune diseases as well. There are over 100 immune-mediated conditions, and many of these diseases share underlying causes, genetic patterns, and may develop in similar ways. If we can uncover answers for RP, these discoveries may have a ripple effect across the spectrum of autoimmunity.

#### DIRECT-TO-PATIENT

A participant never needs to leave their home to participate in PURPOSE. Our team sends participants a study blood collection kit in the mail and works with them to schedule a blood draw at a time and place that is convenient for them.

Once enough biospecimens have been collected and annotated, authorized investigators throughout the United States—and eventually the world—will be able to use this data for leading-edge research that vastly improves the current understanding of RP and related diseases.

“PURPOSE is a new model for research: going directly to patients. This is unprecedented. You generally wait for patients to come to your healthcare system. We may be opening the door for how people conduct research in the future.”

—  
Susan Manzi, MD, MPH,  
Lead Medical Advisor

**LEARN MORE AT  
[PURPOSEBIOBANK.COM](https://PURPOSEBIOBANK.COM)**

Due to the rarity of RP, it is highly challenging and unusual for any single research institution to locally collect enough samples from their patients to make important RP-related discoveries. That’s why PURPOSE Biobank is the first and only of its kind—collecting samples from participants wherever they are.



ERIN FAIGHT, BS, PURPOSE CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR



Check-Out

LARA ERVIN, CLINICAL ACCESS COORDINATOR



**AHN**

Autoimmunity Institute