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Quanterix, Banyan Biomarkers Among Winners of Research Awards for GE, NFL 'Head Health Challenge'
January 23, 2014

The winners of a first round of awards from GE and the National Football League for the development of technologies to improve the diagnosis of mild traumatic brain injury were announced today.

The awards included funding for work directed at identifying molecular signatures of brain injury.

In total, there were 16 winners in the first round of the $20 million GE and NFL Head Health Challenge, each of whom will receive $300,000 to "advance their work to speed diagnosis and improve treatment for mild traumatic brain injury."

The goal of the challenge is to "improve the safety of athletes, members of the military, and society overall," GE and the NFL said, adding that the winners were selected from more than 400 applications.

Up to six of the winners are also eligible to win an additional $500,000 award in 2015.

Among the award recipients are Quanterix, the University of Montana, and Banyan Biomarkers.

Quanterix is using its Simoa technology to develop a blood-based biomarker test to detect traumatic brain injury.

"This is the first time biomarkers will be used as reliable predictors of neurological function and aligns perfectly with the overall goal of this challenge," Paul Chapman, CEO of the Lexington, Mass.-based firm, said in a statement. "One of the most promising applications for our Simoa platform is to provide a simple blood test that could speed the diagnosis of a concussion in a clinical setting and on the sidelines in a sports arena, therefore, improving overall treatment. This is another step in that direction."

The University of Montana will use its award to find blood-based biomarkers that may inform how the brain reacts after a traumatic brain injury. According to GE and the NFL, research has shown that traumatic brain injury leads to changes in brain operation and levels of proteins and RNA.

Banyan Biomarkers will work with the University of Florida to conduct a sports concussion study to analyze biomarkers and conduct neurocognitive testing and neuroimaging on athletes with concussions. Based on the study, the company plans to develop a point-of-care blood test to rapidly detect the presence of mild to moderate brain trauma in order to better manage head injuries.