February 2010

$1 million Walther Cancer Foundation grant to fund IU-Purdue collaboration

The IU Simon Cancer Center and Purdue's Oncological Sciences Center will share a five-year, $1 million grant from the Walther Cancer Foundation to exchange medical fellows, engineers, and scientists for advancing cancer research.

The Walther Oncology Physical Sciences & Engineering Research Embedding Program will be launched through the IU-Purdue Cancer Care Engineering project to create opportunities for postdoctoral fellows to train in clinics and for medical fellows to work in Purdue laboratories as interdisciplinary cancer research teams.

IU and Purdue each will invest an additional $250,000 in the project.

"This innovative partnering of medical fellows and engineering/physical sciences postdoctoral fellows on joint cancer-focused projects will benefit the translation of newly developed technology to the patient," Marietta Harrison, associate vice president for research and director of Purdue's Oncological Sciences Center, said.

Purdue engineers, chemists, and physicists have global expertise in the development of diagnostics, imaging techniques and systems engineering and would benefit from the perspective of a clinical setting, Harrison said. At the same time, the IU Simon Cancer Center is an international leader in applying technologies in a clinical patient setting.

"Using the strengths of these two premier institutions as a living laboratory for cross-training scientists, engineers, and medical fellows, this initiative will be a transformational change in how we train the next generation of medical researchers," Dr. Patrick Loehrer Sr., interim director of the IU Simon Cancer Center, said.

Project leaders at Purdue are Julie Nagel, managing director of the Oncological Sciences Center; Joe Pekny, interim head of industrial engineering and chemical engineering professor; and Harrison.

Purdue's project partners include the colleges of science and engineering, the Purdue Center for Cancer Research, and the Office of the Vice President for Research. Loehrer is leading IU's efforts in the partnership.

The Cancer Care Engineering project, led by IU and Purdue faculty, is applying systems-engineering principles, data visualization, and statistical modeling to the broad spectrum of cancer prevention, treatment, and care delivery.

Cancer Care Engineering is a collaboration among the Oncological Sciences Center, Bindley Bioscience Center, Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering and the Rosen Center for Advanced Computing at Purdue along with the IU Simon Cancer Center, Regenstrief Institute/Indiana University Center for Health Services & Outcomes Research, and the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center.

The Walther Cancer Foundation, Regenstrief Foundation in Indianapolis, and the U.S. Department of Defense are providing funding for this research project.

Since it was launched in 1985, the Walther Cancer Foundation has invested almost $100 million in cancer-focused medical research.

February 2010

Abonour receives Sagamore of the Wabash

Rafat Abonour, MD, received a Sagamore of the Wabash, the highest honor an Indiana governor can bestow, during a special ceremony Feb. 19.

Dr. Abonour, an oncologist and researcher at the IU Simon Cancer Center and professor of medicine at the IU School of Medicine, was formally recognized for his distinguished service during a reception attended by patients and their families as well as his family, friends, and colleagues at the cancer center.

For the past five years, Dr. Abonour -- an avid amateur marathon runner -- has put his body to the test by running and biking on two consecutive days for Miles for Myeloma. He has run and biked more than 700 miles and raised more than $1 million since starting Miles for Myeloma.

The money is used for research devoted to finding a cure for multiple myeloma, an incurable but treatable blood cancer.

Why does Abonour push himself physically?

While a fellow at the University of Wisconsin, he followed some myeloma patients and was struck by how they dealt with an incurable disease.

“They were able to live with the fact that it’s incurable. They were so faithful to the medical field and the caregiver and giving back more than I was giving them,” he explained. “I was rewarded by a lot of admiration and respect. Every myeloma patient I have met has been the same. They always give you back more than you give them,” he said.

It is his affection for his patients that drives him to make further inroads against the disease.

“We’re still losing patients,” he said. “It’s disheartening that we can’t cure these people. I think the mission is to find out why we can’t cure them.”

Dr. Abonour raises his new bike that was given to him by his patients and their families, colleagues, and friends during a surprise celebration Feb. 19.

February 2010

News briefs

HOG celebrates 25 years in April

You're invited to help Hoosier Oncology Group (HOG) celebrate its 25th anniversary during an April 10 gala at the Scottish Rite Cathedral. The event will recognize HOG founders Drs. Rafat Ansari, Larry Einhorn, Bill Fisher, Patrick Loehrer, Prasad Mantravadi, and Ken Pennington. Merril Hoge -- former NFL player, ESPN commentator, and cancer survivor -- is the keynote speaker. Visit the 25th anniversary page for more information.

Grants available to researchers

For the latest grant opportunities, visit the Funding Opportunities page on the IUSCC Web site.

Cancer center members in the news

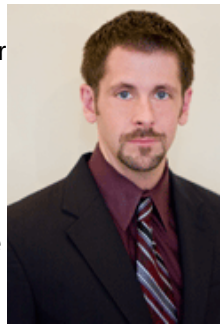
- **George Sledge**, MD, has stepped down as ECOG breast committee chair, a position he has held since 2003, to turn his attention to his ASCO presidency, which begins in June. **Kathy Miller**, MD, will now serve as the committee's vice-chair.

- In the January 11, 2010, issue of *Bone Marrow Transplantation*, **Robert Nelson**, MD, and colleagues (**Jennifer Schwartz**, MD; **Gail Vance**, MD; **Shivani Srivastava**, MBBS; **Kent Robertson**, MD, PhD; **Paul Haut**, MD, FAAP; **Sherif Farag**, MBBS, PhD; **Rafat Abonour**, MD; **Kenneth Cornetta**, MD; and **Larry Cripe**, MD) write about their study of acute myeloid leukemia (AML) or myelodysplasia (MDS) patients that provides further evidence for prolonged disease-free survival after CY/Flu match related (MRD) allotransplantation for AML/MDS and extends the findings to older patients and those with unrelated donors.

- **Mark Henderson**, MD, **Higinia Caredenes**, MD, PhD, and colleagues report in the January 2010 issue of *Brachytherapy* that adjuvant therapy for uterine papillary serous carcinoma (UPSC) and clear cell carcinoma (CCC) with intraperitoneal 32P and vaginal brachytherapy after adequate surgical staging and maximal cytoreduction is well tolerated and appears

to be effective, thus, further study is warranted.

- **Bryan Schneider**, MD, **Kathy Miller**, MD, and colleagues published "The Role of Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor Genetic Variability in Cancer" in *Clinical Cancer Research*.


Schneider

- **Nasser Hanna**, MD, and colleagues recently wrote in the journal *Lung Cancer*: "Although the number of treatment options for patients with advanced non-small cell lung cancer NSCLC has increased recently, their results remain modest and further research is mandatory."

- **Anna Maria Storniolo**, MD, **George Sledge**, MD, and colleagues concluded in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* that despite disease progression on prior trastuzumab-based therapy, lapatinib in combination with trastuzumab significantly improved progression-free survival and clinical benefit rate versus lapatinib alone, thus offering a chemotherapy-free option with an acceptable safety profile to patients with ErbB2-positive metastatic breast cancer.

- In the March/April 2010 issue of *mAbs*, **Kathy Miller**, MD, and colleagues wrote: "Our results further suggest that Adnectins (a novel, proprietary class of targeted biologics) are an important new class of targeted biologics that can be developed as potential treatments for a wide variety of diseases."

- **Harikrishna Nakshatri,** BVSc, PhD, and **Daniela Matei**, MD, published "Epithelial-to-Mesenchymal Transition and Ovarian Tumor Progression Induced by Tissue Transglutaminase" in the Dec. 15, 2009, issue of *Cancer Research*.


Nakshatri

- **Hal Broxmeyer**, PhD, assumed duties as president of the American Society of Hematology (ASH) in January.

- **Ken Nephew**, PhD, and colleagues published "Estrogen Receptor-alpha-interacting Cytokeratins Potentiate the Antiestrogenic Activity of Fulvestrant" in the March 1, 2010, issue of *Cancer Biology & Therapy*.

- **Janet Carpenter**, PhD, RN, is leading a study that tests a new way to treat hot flashes without medications by breathing. The study, Breathe for Hot Flashes, is open to women who are having hot flashes either because of menopause or breast cancer.


Carpenter

- **Rafat Abonour**, MD, has been named chair of the Hoosier Oncology Group's (HOG) board of directors.

New members

Simon Conway, PhD
Department of Pediatrics
Full member, TBM

Judd Cummings, MD
Orthopedic Surgery
Associate member, TBM

Shadia Jalal, MD
Department of Medicine, Division of Hematology/Oncology
Associate member, Experimental and Developmental Therapeutics

Khalid Mohammad, MD, PhD
Division of Endocrinology
Associate member, TBM

Michael Moore, MD
Department of Otolaryngology
Affiliate member

Roger Slee, PhD
Department of Medical and Molecular Genetics
Associate member, breast cancer

Robert Strother, MD
Department of Medicine, Division of Hematology/Oncology
Associate member, Experimental and Developmental Therapeutics