



December 2010

\$3.4 million Walther Cancer Foundation grant promotes palliative care research, education

A \$3.4 million grant from the Walther Cancer Foundation will promote research and education of palliative care at the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center.

The grant, which creates the Walther Program in Palliative Care Research and Education, will help clinicians, researchers, and educators at the IU Simon Cancer Center learn how to best integrate palliative care into conventional cancer care and to provide the highest quality of life for patients and their families undergoing cancer treatment.

Palliative care is a rapidly developing medical specialty that emphasizes the prevention and treatment of the symptoms of a disease, side effects caused by treatment of a disease, and psychological, social, and spiritual problems related to a disease or its treatment. Palliative care also focuses on the conversations required to reach a shared understanding of care goals. Preliminary studies have suggested that cancer care combined with palliative care leads to a better quality of life, fewer depressive symptoms, and a longer life expectancy.

"We are not only excited by this grant, but also deeply appreciative and grateful to the Walther Cancer Foundation for

the opportunity that the grant represents," Greg Sachs, MD, division director of general internal medicine and geriatrics at the IU School of Medicine and a co-leader of the new program, said. "Funding for palliative care research has been one of the biggest challenges for the field, so this grant is a real game changer. It will allow us to jump-start our work from one that is promising to one that makes a real difference."



Sachs

James Ruckle, PhD, president and CEO of the Walther Cancer Foundation, said: "The Walther Cancer Foundation has a long-standing interest in improving the quality of life of cancer patients and their families. Dr. Joseph Walther, our founder, was especially concerned about mitigating the suffering of patients with life limiting disease and the distress it causes their families. We are very pleased the IU Simon Cancer Center is committed to building an exemplary research program in this important area."

The Walther Program in Palliative Care Research and Education will build upon the expertise of clinicians and researchers currently engaged in palliative care at the IU Simon Cancer Center to design, test, and implement evidence-based palliative care practices.

For example, physicians will design and test simulated patient-physician conversations about end-of-life care to enhance the quality of communication and decision-making near the end of life.

"The program will impact our patients because we'll work with physicians on communication skills -- skills necessary for

shared decision making, skills necessary to have meaningful conversations about the options as life may be ending. It will allow us to place more emphasis on a sense of control for the patients," Larry Cripe, MD, medical director of palliative care at IU Hospital and a leukemia specialist and researcher at the cancer center, said. Dr. Cripe will co-lead the new program with Dr. Sachs.



Cripe

The Palliative Care Research and Education program also will provide for:

- Healthcare provider education in palliative care to assure greater access to adequate symptom control and psychosocial support of patients with life-limiting illnesses during all phases of treatment
- Testing novel interventions, such as yoga or music therapy, to lessen distressing physical, psychological, or spiritual symptoms
- Developing and testing innovative programs to address unmet needs of family caregivers
- Assessing the impact of palliative care on the healthcare system and financial resources
- Cross-disciplinary collaboration with traditional and non-traditional healthcare providers
- Public advocacy of palliative care
- Resources to recruit a nationally-renowned investigator. A senior physician-investigator who has a substantial track record of securing funding from the National Institutes of Health for palliative care can help enhance the program at the IU Simon Cancer Center.

"Because of the Walther grant, this program will become a leader in innovative ways to improve the overall quality and cost-effectiveness of cancer care, reduce the burden of poorly controlled symptoms, and restore effective communication with patients and families about goals, preferences, and likely outcomes from diagnosis to long-term survivorship or the end of life," Dr. Cripe said.



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Dr. Sledge takes honor for international contributions to breast cancer research

George Sledge Jr., MD, a nationally recognized pioneer in the development of novel therapies for breast cancer, received the 2010 William L. McGuire Memorial Lecture Award at the 33rd Annual CTCR-AACR San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium in early December.

Supported by GlaxoSmithKline Oncology (GSK) since its inception in 1992, this honor acknowledges distinguished internationally recognized researchers for their significant contributions to breast cancer research.

Dr. Sledge is the Ballve-Lantero Professor of Oncology and professor of medicine and pathology at the IU School of Medicine and a physician/researcher at the IU Simon Cancer Center. He is also co-director of the cancer center's breast cancer program. Sledge specializes in the study and treatment of breast cancer, and his research specifically focuses on molecular and tumor biology, growth factors and anti-angiogenic therapy. He has chaired several nationwide clinical trials involving new therapies for breast cancer.

"Dr. Sledge's work developing novel therapies to treat women with breast cancer has improved the lives of countless cancer patients," said C. Kent Osborne, MD, co-director of the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium and director of the Baylor College of Medicine Dan L. Duncan Cancer Center. "The selection of Dr. Sledge is even more appropriate since he was one of the first medical oncology fellows to graduate the new fellowship training program at the University of Texas Health Science Center Division of Medical Oncology, established by Dr. McGuire as division director in the late 1970s. We congratulate Dr. Sledge on this fitting honor."

Paolo Paoletti, MD, senior vice president and head of the oncology R&D unit at GlaxoSmithKline, said: "Dr. Sledge has been a true visionary and pioneer in the progression of pathway-related treatments for breast cancer and other diseases. His work with HER2-positive, anti-angiogenesis treatment helped herald a new era in the treatment of breast cancer, and millions of patients have benefitted from this advancement in science. Admirably, all of Dr. Sledge's contributions to research were done with a unique attention and commitment for patients' feelings and needs, which drive everything he does. This award is befitting of such a tremendous scientist and supporter of patient care."





George Sledge, MD, (far left) receives the McGuire Memorial Lecture award at the 2010 San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium. More than 9,000 physicians, researchers, patient advocates, and healthcare professionals from more than 90 countries attended the symposium earlier this month. Dr. Sledge is currently president of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO).



December 2010

Core spotlight

Therapeutic Validation Core

Kathy Miller, MD, is working on a phase I study that will combine Herceptin and a novel telomerase inhibitor, GRN163L.

Based on data from **Brittney-Shea Herbert, PhD**, the study's results show that the combination is very effective in HER2-positive breast cancer cells that are resistant to Herceptin, according to Dr. Miller.

"We're not expecting an interaction between the two drugs, but it's the first time they've been given together, so if there are increased or unusual side effects, it will be important to know if there is a pharmacogenetic interaction between the two," Dr. Miller said. "We need to measure the concentrations of the two drugs in patient samples."

So, Dr. Miller turned to the [Therapeutic Validation Core \(TVC\)](#) for assistance.

The core's staff, among other things, will measure the Herceptin levels for Dr. Miller.

Therapeutic Validation Core (TVC)

Nagendra Prasad, BVSc, PhD, serves as associate director of the TVC.

Questions? Contact him at 278-6608 or nkprasad@iupui.edu.

The core is located in Walther Hall (R3), Room 558.

The TVC assists clinical investigators to develop and perform correlative biological assays needed to validate mechanism(s) of action of candidate drugs/therapies and to develop and test new hypotheses. The TVC also provides technical and intellectual support in the development, implementation, and validation of predictive and pharmacodynamic biomarkers for novel, molecularly-targeted anticancer agents

Karen Pollok, PhD, the core's director, said physicians and researchers can no longer just ask: Did we cure the patient? Did we prolong the patient's life?

Instead, the questions today are: Why did the drug work? Why didn't it work?

The core helps to answer those questions. "Can we

biochemically and molecularly go in and find the reasons why something worked and why it didn't?" Dr. Pollok said of the core's services.

TVC scientists are experienced in a wide variety of *in vitro* biology skills and have strong cancer biology expertise. Consequently, TVC is well positioned to develop appropriate pharmacodynamic assays to meet translational research goals.

TVC services include:

- Pre-consultation: Some of the areas where TVC can provide useful advice are literature review on correlative aspects, identification of appropriate assays, type of samples appropriate for the proposed assay, sampling frequencies, sample collection protocols, selection of assays, assay design and development of work plan (SOPs), budget, and feasibility analysis.
- Assay development and optimization
- Generation of preliminary data
- Data analysis, preparation of publication quality figures and write-up of relevant sections of the manuscripts, grant proposals, or research reports
- Examples of *in vitro* assays include
- Isolation of specific subpopulation of hematopoietic cells
- Flow cytometry
- Cytokine quantification and profiling (ELISA, ELIspot, Luminex assays)
- Comet assays
- Cell cycle analysis
- Ex-vivo or *in vitro* Cell-based assays (proliferation, cytotoxicity, apoptosis, colony formation)
- Isolation of DNA/RNA/protein
- Western blots
- PCR/Q-PCR
- microRNA detection and quantification



December 2010

News briefs

Grant launches Cervical Cancer-Free Indiana Initiative

Indiana will join a multi-state program focused on cervical cancer prevention thanks to an unrestricted gift from GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals to the IU School of Medicine, in partnership with the Kristen Forbes EVE Foundation.

[more](#) 

HOPE donates \$100,000 to IUSCC

HOPE (Health Opportunity through Partnership in Education) has donated \$100,000 as an endowment to help cancer researchers at the IU Simon Cancer Center. The HOPE gift establishes the HOPE Endowment Fund for Cancer Research at the IU Simon Cancer Center. HOPE is a non-profit organization that provides charitable funds to promote good health and to encourage scientific research and disseminate information concerning the prevention and detection of cancer and other diseases. HOPE is associated with Washington National Insurance Co., which is based in Carmel, Ind.

IU Simon Cancer Center seeks high school, college applicants for summer research program

Do you know of high school or college students who have an interest in cancer research? If so, tell them about the IU Simon Cancer Center's 2011 Summer Research Program. The cancer center's annual Summer Research Program, held in partnership with the IUPUI Center for Research and Learning, places students with a mentor physician or researcher for nine weeks (June 1 to July 29) on the IUPUI campus. Additional information and an online application is available at www.cancer.iu.edu/srp. Applications are due Feb. 11.

Reminders

- **Membership criteria changes**
IU Simon Cancer Center membership criteria, benefits, and responsibilities have been updated. Membership in the IU Simon Cancer Center is open to full-time faculty of Indiana University or IUPUI who contribute on some level to the overall mission of the cancer center in areas of research, education, patient care, or community outreach. [Learn more.](#)
- **Miss a Combined Seminar Series?**
Did you miss a Combined Seminar Series? You can now watch it online. A full listing of past Seminar Series events

is [here](#). Also, speakers for the 2010-11 academic year have been announced. You can find the schedule [here](#).

- **Grants available to researchers**

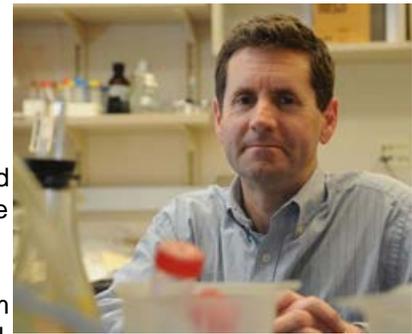
For the latest grant opportunities, visit the [Funding Opportunities](#) page on the IUSCC Web site.

- **Clarian becomes IU Health**

Clarian Health will become Indiana University Health as part of the new brand position of *assurance* and its role in the patient experience in early 2011. Visit www.clarian.org/unite for more. (This site is only accessible via on-campus computers.)

Cancer center members in the news

- **David Skalnik**, PhD, has been named associate dean for research and graduate education at the School of Science at IUPUI. He will assume his new position in January 2011. Skalnik is a professor of pediatrics and of biochemistry and molecular biology at the IU School of Medicine. He holds a doctorate in biological sciences from Stanford University and completed post-doctoral



Skalnik

training in molecular biology at Children's Hospital Boston, the primary pediatric teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School. A leader in the rapidly advancing field of epigenetics, the study of factors influencing the behavior of gene function that do not involve changes in the structure of DNA, Skalnik's research focuses on how proteins control when DNA segments are turned on and off -- both appropriately and inappropriately. With greater knowledge of these functions it is possible that drugs could be identified to reactivate a gene silenced in error making it unable to regulate cell growth or proliferation. Throughout his career, Skalnik has taught and mentored in the laboratory setting. In 2004, he received the IU Trustee's Teaching Award for outstanding teaching at the graduate level.

- The American Society of Hematology (ASH), of which **Hal Broxmeyer**, PhD, serves as president, hosted its 52nd annual meeting in Orlando, Fla., Dec. 4-7. More than 20,000 attendees were expected for this event, which highlighted emerging research trends in the diagnosis, treatment, and understanding of blood disorders. ASH is the world's largest professional society concerned with the causes and treatment of blood disorders.
- **David Flockhart**, MD, PhD, has been appointed to the National Advisory Research Resources Council of the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Flockhart also serves as the program leader of the Disease and Therapeutic Response Modeling Program at the Indiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute. Council members meet

three times a year to advise the National Center for Research Resources on its policies and programs, as well as to provide the second level of review on grant applications. Council members serve for four years.

- **Kathy Miller**, MD, has been named to the ASCO Nominating Committee. She will serve from 2011 to 2014.
- **Debra Burns**, PhD, recently was awarded the 2010 American Music Therapy Association's (AMTA) Outstanding Research/Publications Award. Dr. Burns received this honor for the myriad of contributions she has made to the development of the music therapy field, most notably through extensive research and scholarly work.
- **Sherif Farag**, MBBS, PhD, presented interim results from the Phase 1 study with ENMD-2076, an Aurora A/angiogenic kinase inhibitor, in relapsed or refractory multiple myeloma (MM) patients during poster sessions at the 2010 American Society of Hematology (ASH) Annual Meeting earlier this month. Data showed that daily oral administration of ENMD-2076 was well tolerated. No dose limiting toxicities (DLT) were observed in this heavily pre-treated patient population. Of the nine evaluable patients, three patients had stable disease and one patient achieved a partial response. Pharmacodynamic studies in this trial are ongoing and include examination of the effects of ENMD-2076 on markers of angiogenesis as well as on key survival pathways important in MM progression such as the PI3 kinase pathway.



Burns