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Nationally recognized prostate, renal and bladder cancer expert joins IU Simon Cancer Center

June 11, 2015

INDIANAPOLIS – Roberto Pili, M.D., a nationally recognized expert in prostate, renal and bladder cancers, has joined the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center.

Dr. Pili is the Robert Wallace Miller Professor of Oncology at the Indiana University School of Medicine and a researcher at the IU Simon Cancer Center. In his new position, Dr. Pili also will direct the genitourinary research program at the cancer center. In addition, Dr. Pili will serve as the medical director of the genitourinary clinical program at the IU Health Simon Cancer Center. The genitourinary program supports treatment for prostate, bladder, kidney, testicular and penile cancers.

Dr. Pili said that the genitourinary research program's scientists will collaborate with researchers at the Purdue University Center for Cancer Research. The developing program will be co-led by Dr. Timothy Ratliff, the Robert Wallace Miller Director of the Purdue cancer center. On the clinical side, Dr. Pili said his goal is to focus on drug resistance in those genitourinary cancers, providing new options for those patients.

Dr. Pili said he was attracted to Indiana University "because of the national reputation that the university and the cancer center have and the collaboration with Purdue is a great opportunity. It's unique that two cancer centers can put together resources to improve patient care."

Both centers are National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers. The two are among an elite group of 68 cancer centers across the country that focus on the rapid translation of research discoveries to directly benefit people with cancer. The IU Simon Cancer Center is the only NCI-designated cancer center in Indiana that provides patient care.

Most recently, Dr. Pili was professor of oncology, chief of the genitourinary section, and leader of the genitourinary program at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, N.Y.

Dr. Pili earned his medical degree from the Catholic University School of Medicine, Rome, Italy. He did his residency training in internal medicine at Montefiore Medical Center, completed a clinical research fellowship in medical oncology at Johns Hopkins University and a second fellowship at the National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health. His laboratory research focuses on the development of novel therapeutic agents, including epigenetic agents such as histone deacetylase inhibitors and understanding their immunomodulatory effects. He also conducts phase I/II clinical trials of novel agents for the treatment of genitourinary malignancies. Dr. Pili is the recipient of research grants from the National Cancer Institute.

Dr. Pili is a member of the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the American Association for Cancer Research. He serves as a reviewer for study sections of the NCI and the Department of Defense. Dr. Pili has authored or co-authored more than 130 journal publications, abstracts, and book chapters.

About the Miller Professorship

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Roberto Pili, M.D.

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Robert Wallace Miller was the son of V. Richard and Jane Miller. The "Robbie Chair" was established by his parents who cherish the memory of their 11-year-old son who was stricken with undiagnosed rhabdomyosarcoma and died after a game of baseball. His only symptom was a runny nose. Robbie is also survived by his siblings, Rick Miller and Pam Dilley and their families.

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IU research: A microRNA may provide therapy against pancreatic cancer

June 22, 2015

INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana University cancer researchers found that a particular microRNA may be a potent therapeutic agent against pancreatic cancer. The research was published June 22 in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Led by Janaiah Kota, Ph.D., assistant professor of medical and molecular genetics at the IU School of Medicine and a researcher at the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center, the researchers found that restoring missing microRNA-29 (miR-29) in pancreatic cancer stromal cells reduced the viability and growth of the cancerous cells.

A thick fibrotic shell around the cancer cells is known as “stroma,” which protects the pancreatic cancer cells from anticancer drugs such as chemotherapy.

“We found that the loss of miR-29 is a common phenomenon of pancreatic cancer stromal cells, and that by restoring it, the stromal accumulation and cancer growth was reduced,” Dr. Kota said. “The use of miR-29 as a therapeutic agent may be more effective in targeting reactive stroma, as a single miRNA regulates the expression of several genes associated with disease mechanisms.”

“In healthy cells and tissues, a single miRNA controls the expression of hundreds of genes, and any alterations in their normal expression leads to abnormal overexpression of bad genes that are favorable for the growth of cancer cells and are harmful to normal cells,” Dr. Kota explained.

Dr. Kota and his colleagues were studying the role of small non-coding RNAs called miRNAs in molecular mechanisms associated with pancreatic cancer stroma to evaluate their use for therapeutic intervention in pancreatic cancer. They found that there is loss of miR-29 in stroma of the pancreatic tumors compared to the healthy pancreas. The researchers expected its expression in stromal cells would restore normal function of stromal cells and reduce the abundance of fibrotic stromal proteins. However, they were surprised that when they co-cultured miR-29 overexpressing stromal cells with cancer cells, it also reduced the viability and growth of cancer cells for unknown factors.

They are currently performing additional studies to understand the molecular mechanisms associated with the effect of miR-29 overexpression in stromal cells on cancer cells as well as in preclinical animal models.

“This is a novel approach that has the potential to overcome the problems associated with current anti-stromal drugs and that could lead to improved therapeutic strategies, enhanced drug delivery to the tumor bed, and, in the future, improved patient survival,” said Dr. Korc, the Myles Brand Professor of Cancer Research at the IU School of Medicine and a researcher at the IU Simon Cancer Center. Dr. Korc is also director of the Pancreatic Cancer Signature Center.

The need for new therapies for pancreatic cancer patients is great as only 7 percent of people with the disease survive more than 5 years after diagnosis. According to the National Cancer Institute, there will be an estimated 48,960 new cases of pancreatic cancer and 40,560 deaths from the disease in 2015.

PRINT SHARE



Janaiah Kota, Ph.D.

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The research was supported by the Elsa U. Pardee Foundation and the [Pancreatic Cancer Signature Center](#).

Other IU collaborators included Murray Korc, M.D.; Romil Saxena, M.D.; Grzegorz Nalepa, M.D., Ph.D.; Jesse Gore, Ph.D.; Zhangsheng Yu, Ph.D.; Zahi Abdul-Sater; Ravi Alluri Ph.D.; Smiti Sahu; Sarah Nabinger; and first author Jason Kwon, as well as Zachary Vega of Wabash College.

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY

IU SIMON CANCER CENTER

Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center



IUSCC news

June 2015

News briefs

Komen Tissue Bank plans Detroit event in 2016

Staff from the [Komen Tissue Bank at the IU Simon Cancer Center](#) recently visited the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute in Detroit to continue plans



**TISSUE BANK AT THE
IU SIMON CANCER CENTER**

for a September 2016 breast tissue collection event in the Motor City. The staff met with radiologists, surgeons,

researchers, potential minority recruitment partners, and others. In return, six to eight people from Karmanos are expected to participate and observe the breast tissue collection event in Indianapolis this fall. Earlier this year, the Komen Tissue Bank traveled to the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston in which 160 women donated. To date, more than 4,000 women have donated tissue and more than 10,000 women also have donated DNA and blood.

Also, the tissue bank has acquired a Nikon Eclipse Ci-L dual-head microscope to use for reviewing slides of all the tissue cores that are collected. A single 5um section (an average human hair is 100um) of a core is placed on the slide, stained, and reviewed. The core can then be rated for its appropriateness for different kinds of research. This system of viewing sections and rating the cores has enabled the tissue bank to confidently send cores to researchers that are completely usable in their research.



Confetti falls during a celebratory dinner, marking the end of the annual Vera Bradley Classic in early June. The classic raised \$834,658 for breast cancer research at the IU Simon Cancer Center. Since 1999, Vera Bradley's total giving to the cancer center has been \$23.2 million. The classic is billed as the largest amateur women's golf and tennis tournament in the United States.

24 Hours of Booty kicks off tonight

[24 Hours of Booty](#) returns to Indy this weekend. From 7 p.m. Friday until 7 p.m. Saturday, more than 400 riders are expected to take to the 3 ½- mile course at



Butler University to raise money for the IU Simon Cancer Center and the Livestrong Foundation. Last year, Pedaling Cures, the IU Simon Cancer Center's 24 Hours

of Booty cycling team, rode more than 4,300 miles and raised \$21,478.

Cancer center members in the news

JT Zhang, PhD, Jianyun Liu, PhD, Hal Broxmeyer, PhD, Karen Pollok, PhD, and colleagues wrote "Small-molecule Inhibitors Targeting the DNA-binding Domain of STAT3 Suppress Tumor Growth, Metastasis and STAT3 Target Gene Expression in Vivo," which appeared in [Oncogene](#).

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