Clinical Studies Provide Critical Links to New Treatments

The past decades have seen exponential growth in researchers’ understanding of the different biologic origins of individual cancers and the development of new targeted therapies. One of the most critical steps in getting these life-saving cancer treatments to the patients who need them is clinical trials—the process of rigorously researching each new potential drug therapy to discover which ones successfully produce the hoped-for results with real patients.

“Every approved drug we use to treat cancer started out as a clinical trial, because the only way to find out if drugs will work is to first test them in patients,” explained Joshi Alumkal, M.D. A prostate cancer specialist, Alumkal recently concluded a clinical trial funded by the Wayne D. Kuni and Joan E. Kuni Foundation to investigate the effects of sulforaphane (found in certain vegetables) in patients with prostate cancer. The results to date are encouraging.

In fact, there is much hope in general for prostate cancer, thanks to both the numerous advances in laboratory discoveries and the all-important clinical trials to test these findings. A measurement of this new progress is the four new drugs approved for prostate cancer in the past two years—in contrast to only one drug approved in the previous 20 years. OHSU prostate cancer researchers have been involved in the majority of these research studies.

(continued on page 11)
Director’s Message

At the Knight Cancer Institute, our research and care providers see a world without cancer. Building upon our pioneering leadership in personalized cancer medicine, we are determined to provide individually tailored, compassionate care for every patient we see, discover new ways to prevent cancer and continue to produce new personalized cancer therapies.

This issue features some of the significant investments the Knight Cancer Institute is making in world class research and care to advance this progress. For example, the Knight recently recruited Charles Blanke, M.D., who oversees SWOG (formerly the Southwest Oncology Group) – one of the largest National Cancer Institute-funded clinical trials network in the country. Dr. Blanke’s role with SWOG directly links Oregon to SWOG’s network of world-class scientists, which will strengthen the Knight’s ongoing efforts to forge partnerships to speed progress on behalf of cancer patients. SWOG has more than 4,000 affiliated physician researchers participating at more than 500 institutions throughout the world. Several articles also highlight the importance of clinical research in bringing new treatments to patients.

We are grateful for the contributions of visionary scientists, dedicated care teams and generous people who are helping us end cancer as we know it. In addition to supporting vital research, philanthropic support enables us to embark upon educational and outreach initiatives to improve early detection and promote healthy lifestyles. Gifts also make possible important resources for patients, including the Patient Assistance Fund to help patients in need, and wellness programs, such as mindfulness based stress reduction classes and massage therapy.

On behalf of the Knight’s research and care teams and people who benefit from our progress, thank you for your commitment and support of our work.

Sincerely,

Brian Druker, M.D.
Director, OHSU Knight Cancer Institute
JELD-WEN Chair for Leukemia Research
Associate Dean for Oncology, OHSU School of Medicine

Training the Next Generation — In August, OHSU recognized high school and college participants in the Ted R. Lilley Cancer CURE Program and OHSU Summer Equity Research Program. Both programs—which have a competitive application process—bring students to campus to work in a research setting and to receive mentorship opportunities. Knight Director Brian Druker, M.D., and Knight Council Member Charles Lilley were among those who joined the awards ceremony.
For anyone who is considering treatment options in addition to standard cancer therapy, a new book, *Cancer Clinical Trials: A Commonsense Guide to Experimental Cancer Therapies and Clinical Trials*, by Tom Beer, M.D., and Larry Axmaker, Ed.D., provides a comprehensive overview to understanding the clinical trials process.

Beer, a renowned prostate cancer expert, and Axmaker, a prostate cancer survivor, say they designed this book to be the definitive guide for anyone considering participation in a cancer clinical trial. The book highlights questions to ask before and during a clinical trial, features to look for and those to be avoided, and helpful resources. The book also discusses what cancer is and explains the many ways it is treated.

“We hope to help patients with cancer and their families make the right decisions for their care,” Beer says. “If they choose clinical trials, we aim to help them navigate through the maze of being a participant in a study.”

Beer, deputy director of the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute, also leads its prostate cancer program. He has led more than a hundred clinical trials, ranging from trials that study a medication in humans for the first time to global large-scale trials designed to change cancer care. Axmaker is a retired psychologist, teacher, and writer who has prostate cancer and has participated in several clinical trials. His recently published book, *Real Men Get Prostate Cancer, Too*, chronicles his sometimes serious, sometimes humorous journey with his cancer.

On Wednesday, Sept. 12, 2012, at 7 p.m. at Powell’s Books at Cedar Hills Crossing, Beer and Axmaker will discuss their new book. Their talk is free and open to the public. For more information call 503 494-3607 or email supporttheknight@ohsu.edu.

New Book Helps Cancer Patients Navigate Clinical Trials

New Recruit Will Increase Clinical Trial Access

Charles D. Blanke, M.D., chair-elect of SWOG, one of the largest National Cancer Institute (NCI)-funded clinical trial networks, will join the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute. With Blanke’s recruitment, the Knight will serve as headquarters for SWOG (formerly the Southwest Oncology Group), which oversees more than $40 million in research annually. As a result, patients throughout the Pacific Northwest who are served by OHSU will have greater access to SWOG clinical trials.

SWOG studies most adult cancers with more than 4,000 affiliated physician researchers participating at more than 500 institutions throughout the world. About 100 SWOG clinical trials are under way at any given time.

“I was drawn to the Knight Cancer Institute because of its leadership in molecularly-driven, personalized cancer medicine, as well as its willingness to make significant investments in research to advance that field. The work Knight investigators are doing to pave the way for development of more targeted therapies aimed at curing a variety of cancers based on the specific biology of a patient’s tumor, is a major focus of SWOG research as well,” said Blanke, who will join the Knight in February (2013). Blanke also will serve with the Knight’s team of gastrointestinal cancer specialists.

Blanke currently is vice-president of systemic therapy for the British Columbia Cancer Agency, chief of medical oncology at the University of British Columbia and chair of the Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor (GIST) Task Force for the NCI’s Gastrointestinal Steering Committee. Previously, he held positions with OHSU and Vanderbilt University.

Blanke is the most recent of the Knight’s recruits as it continues to grow its world-class cancer program. Other recent additions include Lisa Coussens, Ph.D., from the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) whose breast cancer research has changed the understanding of the immune system’s role in cancer development; and, internationally renowned cancer and genomic researcher Joe Gray, Ph.D., who helped develop the fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH) and comparative genomic hybridization (CGH) tests that are transforming how treatments are selected for breast cancer patients.
Christopher Ryan, M.D., a specialist in kidney cancer and sarcoma, is passionate about the importance of clinical trials and remembers vividly how gratifying it was to work with kidney cancer patients during the testing of sorafenib, a drug that was approved in 2005 because of its ability to shrink tumors and slow the cancer’s growth. A number of these patients who are still alive today benefited because of their participation in these early clinical trials.

Ryan believes that one of the most important ways to advance research is to invest in clinical studies. "If people have an interest in supporting cancer research," he said, "contributing to clinical trials offers the best chance of directly helping a patient."

Eric Parsons, an OHSU Foundation Board member and former chair of the Knight Cancer Institute Council, has a very personal understanding of how clinical trials can help patients. As a young man in the late 1960s he was shocked to discover that he had Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, a disease for which there were no effective treatments at that time. Eric believes that an early clinical trial at OHSU (then the University of Oregon School of Medicine) not only helped save his life, but also helped to advance new standards of care.

The Eric and Janet Parsons Cancer Research Fund, recently established by Eric and his wife Janet, reflects their generous commitment to supporting the essential work of discovery offered by clinical research.

The Knight Cancer Institute is dedicated to continuing to expand its clinical trials program and, with the help of additional philanthropic support, intends to develop a Phase I Clinical Research Program. The essential work of determining which drugs are safe and effective is time-intensive and requires careful screening and enrollment of patients, and skillful study design and analysis. The results will yield invaluable information about potentially life-saving treatments.

"I'm here today because someone believed a better answer to cancer could be found," Parsons said. "Brian Druker and his colleagues are continuing to make exciting breakthroughs in our understanding of how to treat cancer, but these breakthroughs only have meaning when they reach the people who need them. Clinical trials provide the critical link between laboratory findings and the needs of patients with cancer."

The Knight Cancer Institute has established a Clinical Scholars Award program to recognize and support the work of some of the Knight’s most promising clinical investigators.

"Clinical investigators are critical to moving discoveries from the laboratory into the clinic," says Tom Beer, M.D., Knight deputy director. "Yet, obstacles exist that prevent investigators from entering or remaining in the field – including dwindling research funds and the competing demands of clinical and administrative work, which can erode research time. The Clinical Scholars Awards will provide protected research time for these physicians to carry out innovative clinical research that aims to find new ways to prevent cancer or develop new personalized cancer therapies."

Bob Trenner understands firsthand the value of clinical research. His daughter, Ashley, recently participated in a Phase I clinical trial at OHSU. In gratitude the Trenner family made a generous gift that supports the Knight Clinical Scholars Awards and the Knight's Patient Assistance Fund. Trenner says their motivation to give goes way beyond the positive effects of the drugs.

"We are motivated to thank you for being just like Brian [Dr. Druker] – ‘fantastically nice guys’ as you care for Ashley as your patient and for us as her family," said Trenner in a letter to the care team. "Each of you as evidenced by your behavior has a profound understanding that cancer afflicts individuals and affects whole families."

To contribute to the Clinical Scholars Program, call the Knight Development office at 503 494-3607.
In 1967, at the age of 19, I was asked to serve our nation in Vietnam. I accepted the invitation and found myself stationed in Khe Sanh with a strategic combat troop in the U.S. Marine Corps. During my tour, like so many of my fellow veterans of the time, I was heavily exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange, an incident none of us gave much thought to at the time.

In 2007, I started noticing that I was very fatigued, even after simple tasks like yard work. After a general physical, blood tests showed abnormal blood counts and I was diagnosed with Mantle Cell Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma (MCL), a rare and aggressive cancer of the lymph system likely caused by my exposure to Agent Orange nearly 40 years earlier.

I was determined to beat it and immediately began chemotherapy, but after just 6 treatment cycles my counts were so low it became dangerous to continue with chemo. With limited options and time running out I started looking for alternative treatments and a brief search led me to the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute where they were leading a research study on MCL.

During my first visit to the Knight, I was overwhelmed both by the care I received and the knowledge of the doctors. Every person I met treated my wife and me like we were their top priority. They explained that in my case, a stem cell transplant would be the next appropriate step in treatment. After little deliberation, we decided to move my care to OHSU and I underwent a stem cell transplant in October, 2007.

Unfortunately, there is a high likelihood of relapse with MCL and by the following January my cancer had returned. It was devastating, but my team at OHSU was incredible. They simply refused to give up on me. Dr. Stephen Spurgeon was leading the research on a novel treatment regimen developed at OHSU that incorporated a new combination of drugs designed to target the cancer in multiple ways, and I became the first patient to participate in his life-saving clinical trial. I quickly went into remission and more than 3 years later I am so grateful to say I’m still cancer-free.

I will never forget how supportive the entire staff was throughout my treatment and how they continue to care for me in remission. It’s a remarkable place and I am indebted to the team of doctors and researchers who saved my life and the people who make their work possible.

– Ed Rothery

Nearly 70 million men, women and children in the U.S. suffer from urologic and kidney diseases. In men, urologic malignancies – prostate, kidney, bladder and testicular – comprise 40 percent of all cancers diagnosed each year. Through world-class research, patient care and teaching, OHSU’s Department of Urology, headed by prostate cancer expert Christopher Amling, M.D., is leading the search for new treatments for urologic diseases and cancers.

“Our goal is to provide patients with ready access to the highest caliber physicians providing cutting-edge, state-of-the-art care,” said Amling.

A top priority of the Knight Cancer Institute is to endow a chair for urology. An endowed chair is OHSU’s most prestigious academic distinction and is usually held by a senior leader who is renowned in his or her field. Perpetual endowed support provides leaders with professional stature, financial sustainability and the ability to focus more of their time on vital research and clinical activities.

Dr. Amling’s vision is to expand the department’s basic and clinical research programs and provide more opportunities for junior investigators. Support from the endowed fund will provide important resources to conduct research, expand OHSU’s nationally recognized tissue library for urologic cancers, and recruit a laboratory scientist to focus on urologic cancer research.

We have already raised more than $2.2 million toward our $2.5 million goal to endow this chair. Please help us reach our goal by making a gift this fall. Your support will advance critical research to benefit patients. For information call Angela Querfeld, associate director of development, at 503 494-6564.
HOPE

The Walsh family still remembers with painful clarity the moment in June 2011 when they heard the difficult words: “Afton has melanoma.” At the time, Afton was a healthy, active graduate student and an avid athlete. Cancer was most certainly not in her plans.

“It was a devastating beginning,” remembered Marcia Walsh, a former OHSU Foundation board member and a member of the Knight Cancer Institute Council. The spitzoid melanoma that had developed on Afton’s leg is characteristically difficult to diagnose, and this can lead to critical loss of early intervention and treatment for the most deadly of all skin cancers. But Afton was lucky, and after successful surgery to remove the melanoma, she has needed no additional treatment.

For Marcia and Bob Walsh, the relief over their daughter’s recovery—coupled with their new awareness of the increasing prevalence of melanoma, especially in young people—kindled a deep desire to make a difference. A generous gift of $100,000 from the Walsh family and the Walsh Construction Co. Charitable Foundation will be used for education and outreach to students and young adults, raising awareness of the dangers of melanoma and skin cancer and the critical importance of prevention.

“It was shocking to discover that I had melanoma,” remembered Afton. “I had no idea that young people like me are at risk—not for a time far off in the future, but at risk right now while we’re still young.”

Since her diagnosis, Afton has encountered six people in her daily sphere who have had melanoma. And this is no surprise given the alarming increase in the incidence of people under 30 developing the disease—up by 50 percent in young women since 1980. In fact, melanoma is now the most common cancer in adolescents and young people.

“Our family has been incredibly fortunate and we wanted to give back in a way that would make the biggest impact,” said Marcia Walsh. “We want to help kids and young adults understand how important it is to protect themselves and prevent melanoma from developing in the first place.”

Kure It Awards Support for Promising Kidney Cancer Research

As a 14-year kidney cancer survivor, Barry Hoeven is committed to accelerating promising research to find cures for underfunded cancers. Hoeven, who was diagnosed with kidney cancer while on a family vacation, says he recognized early on a grave disconnect existed between the number of people afflicted with kidney cancer and the amount of funding and research being conducted to find a cure. This realization led him to establish Kure It, a non-profit organization that awards funding for innovative research for kidney and other orphan cancers.

“Kure It’s goal is to be the leader in granting funds to researchers conducting innovative projects focusing on kidney cancer and other underfunded malignancies,” said Hoeven. “The progress made will also translate to other cancers.”

Funds raised through Kure It support researchers who are committed to finding long-term treatments, and ultimately a cure for cancer. Kure It recently awarded $100,000 to support the work of George Thomas, M.D., a Knight Cancer Institute surgical pathologist, who is researching a subgroup of kidney cancers called Non-Clear Cell Renal Cell Carcinoma (NCC-RCC). Patients with advanced NCC-RCC have few treatment options. Thomas and his team demonstrated that levels of the cancer-causing gene Src was increased in NCC-RCC cancer cells and patient tumors. They also found that a drug called dasatinib can block Src activity.

“By partnering with Kure It to understand the role of Src in NCC-RCC and increase the efficacy of dasatinib, we hope to improve outcomes for patients,” Thomas said.
Finding Better Answers for GIST

Dan and Shawna Miller understand how important it is to find better answers for people facing a cancer diagnosis. Last summer Shawna was diagnosed with gastrointestinal stromal tumors (GIST), a rare but devastating type of cancer. Had Shawna received that diagnosis a decade earlier, there may not have been a good solution. Fortunately, OHSU researchers had already demonstrated that the cancer drug Gleevec could prevent recurrence of cancer after surgery.

Shawna is now doing well on Gleevec and has been able to continue her active lifestyle. OHSU Knight Cancer Institute Director Brian Druker, M.D., led the development of Gleevec, the first drug able to target cancerous cells while leaving healthy cells intact. OHSU conducted the first international clinical study testing Gleevec in 2000. Eleven years later, many of those same patients facing cancer are still holding strong, their disease under control thanks to Gleevec.

Grateful for the world-class treatment Shawna received at the Knight, the Millers have committed to funding the first $500,000 of a $1 million initiative to speed GIST cancer research discovery. This support will enhance the Knight’s ability to collaborate with GIST researchers around the world – and make progress more quickly.

“The Millers’ investment makes it possible for us to move more quickly from research to clinical care, improving the options available to GIST patients today,” said GIST cancer expert Michael C. Heinrich, M.D., an OHSU professor of medicine and cell and developmental biology.

Tania Stutman was diagnosed with GIST cancer 14 years ago. While most people would have been devastated by the news, Tania was inspired to get moving and involved in raising awareness and support for GIST cancer research. Stutman’s personal experience, combined with her desire to join others with this rare cancer to work toward finding a cure for GIST, led her to start the GIST Cancer Research Fund (GCRF) of which she serves as the chairperson.

With the help of her husband, Robert, a committed board and hundreds of inspired volunteers, the GCRF has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support GIST Cancer Research through an annual walk in New York – the next walk will be on October 14 – and a series of fundraising events across the country. Each year, GCRF volunteers, board members and patients across the country, travel to five institutions, including the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute, to present contributions and meet with GIST cancer researchers to learn about the latest discoveries. This year marked the GCRF’s 10th annual visit to the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute.

Stutman says GIST cancer research keeps her alive. In 2001, Tania entered a clinical trial to test Gleevec as a treatment for gastrointestinal stromal tumors. Her tumors shrank and remain dormant for the time being.

“Life is precious for me and other GIST patients,” said Stutman. “I hope the contributions raised by the GCRF will bring not only hope to all GIST patients but also life. The GCRF makes sure that the needs of GIST patients and families will never be forgotten,” she said.

The American Paint Horse Association’s spring horse show raised support for GIST cancer research. Next year’s event, “Ride, Slide and Roll,” will be held in the second week in May.
Helping Patients in Need

The OHSU Knight Cancer Institute Patient Assistance Fund helps patients with demonstrated financial need cover costs associated with their care such as temporary lodging, transportation, short-term medication assistance, and other medical needs. Gifts of all sizes provide an immediate impact to patients facing financial emergencies during their treatment.

“In some cases giving a patient a gas card can make the difference in his or her ability to get to an appointment – especially when driving from other areas of the state,” says Susan Hedlund, M.S.W., L.C.S.W., manager of the Knight’s Patient and Family Support Services.

The need for assistance can be especially great for patients who must travel long distances to participate in clinical trials. Knight care providers would especially like to increase support as few other resources exist to help with expenses related to travel for clinical trial participation.

The Knight awards assistance based on financial need, availability of funding and travel logistics. In addition to seeking outright support the Knight seeks a philanthropic partner to establish an endowed fund of $500,000 or more to provide support in perpetuity to patients in need.

The Healing Touch of Massage

Massage has long been known to offer gentle healing to restore both body and soul. For patients experiencing the difficult physical symptoms associated with chemotherapy and other cancer treatments, as well as the difficult emotions surrounding a cancer diagnosis, massage is a powerful therapy that brings both comfort and relief.

A growing body of research confirms the importance of complementary therapies in comprehensive cancer care, and massage has been shown to have particularly beneficial effects—reducing anxiety, pain, fatigue, depression and nausea, while also offering vital emotional comfort and support that aids the healing process.

“Everyone knows the benefits of a shoulder rub…but I can attest that when you are sick it is so much more than that,” affirmed former cancer patient Karen Momper. “After a massage I slept better, was more relaxed, and had less pain. While going through cancer treatments, a patient is often isolated from even friends and family. For this reason alone the human touch of therapeutic massage is essential.”

Knight Cancer Institute patients currently benefit from the skillful dedication of a small team of volunteer massage therapists who bring their healing hands and hearts to their role. The results for patients are profound.

One volunteer described patient response this way: “It was a wonderful day at the clinic. Once again I saw four patients—all as different as can be, with different issues. I not only watched, but felt, people melt and almost purr in response to non-invasive, gentle and intentional touch.”

The Knight wants to make massage therapy available to all cancer patients who need it by establishing a formal program to include more specialized massage therapists. It will require philanthropic support to bring this dream to reality, but the incentive to do so is compelling.

“Every day we see patients whose suffering is relieved by massage,” said Susan Hedlund, M.S.W., L.C.S.W., manager of the Knight’s Patient and Family Support Services. “We want every cancer patient to have access to this powerful healing tool.”

NIKE’s North American Sales Team selected the Knight Cancer Institute as the beneficiary of a charity auction held in conjunction with their annual fiscal year-end sales event, raising more than $90,000 for the Knight’s Patient Support Services Program. The theme of the event was “1972,” the year NIKE was founded. Pictured here are cancer survivors and NIKE family members, Chris Crawford and Karen Momper, along with Knight social workers Keren McCord, M.S.W., L.C.S.W., and Nancy Boyle, L.C.S.W., dressed in their 70s best. Their support will benefit support services such as the patient assistance fund to help patients with financial need and wellness programs such as massage therapy.
Joseph Carroll, Ph.D., brings an impressive array of diverse experience to his new role as associate director of business development for the Knight Cancer Institute. He also brings broad vision and compelling clarity to this newly-created position that focuses on building collaborative relationships with key industry partners.

“The Knight Cancer Institute’s mission—to end cancer as we know it—is no small undertaking,” he said. “To meet this goal it’s critical that we create an ecosystem of many partners to work together with common purpose.”

Carroll comes to OHSU with 15 years of experience as a senior scientist with pharmaceutical and biotech companies. He has also acquired an astute sense of how science and business can work effectively together to create new technologies to help patients. Most recently, he oversaw commercialization strategy for the innovative Biomedical Diagnostics Institute at Dublin City University in Ireland, where he built a network of successful alliances with industry partners and secured ongoing funding for the Institute.

“Joseph Carroll’s extensive background in both science and business makes him uniquely qualified to create powerful partnerships with industry, such as pharmaceutical and biotech companies,” said Steve Stadum, COO of the Knight Cancer Institute. “He is a strategic thinker, with an entrepreneurial spirit, and his capacity to build collaborative partnerships will greatly benefit our work in the future.”

When developing these partnerships, Carroll looks for synergies and shared goals that can lead to potent opportunities. OHSU’s current alliance with Hillsboro-based FEI, a leading scientific instruments company — to build a Living Lab that will help scientists, including the Knight’s cancer researchers, better understand how cancer cells grow — is an example of exactly the kind of synergy he looks to create with other alliances in the future.

Increasingly among cancer centers worldwide, there is an understanding of the need to integrate the work and goals of science and business. With Carroll’s appointment, the Knight is leading the way to link the discoveries that come from academics and clinicians with the innovative technologies produced by industry.

Carroll remembers this every morning as he walks through the hospital on the way to his office. “The patients I pass by each day reinforce the importance of our vision to transform the way we treat cancer,” he said. “Personalized cancer treatment is a lofty, but attainable goal, and we are deeply committed to making it a reality.”
Knight Care Providers and Researchers Garner Recognition

Druker Receives Japan Prize
Knight Director Brian Druker, M.D., received the 2012 Japan Prize in Healthcare and Medical Technology for his crucial role in developing targeted cancer drugs. Awarded by the Japan Prize Foundation, the Japan Prize is considered one of the world’s most prestigious awards in science and technology. In April Druker and his family traveled to Tokyo to receive the award.

“I am honored to receive this distinguished award. It is most meaningful to me because the research it recognizes brings hope to cancer patients and their families,” said Druker, JELD-WEN Chair of Leukemia.

This fall Druker will receive the Dickson Prize in Medicine – the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine’s highest honor – awarded annually to an American biomedical researcher who has made significant, progressive contributions to medicine.

Recognizing Outstanding Service Excellence
OHSU’s “Golden ROSE Awards” recognize OHSU employees who have provided exemplary services beyond the normal scope of their job. Each month five outstanding employees, who may be nominated by patients and colleagues, are selected to receive these awards.

Several Knight staff and care providers recently received these awards, including: Rhea Geelan, R.N., resource nurse, Center for Hematologic Malignancies; Lisa Besaw, R.N., Carolyn Blasdel, R.N., F.N.P.-B.C., O.C.N., clinical research nurse, Center for Hematologic Malignancies; Roni St. John, revenue cycle supervisor, Community Hematology Oncology; Sierra Romesburg, Breast Cancer Program coordinator; and Christopher Amling, M.D., chief, Department of Urology.

NIH Honors David Dilts
David Dilts, Ph.D., M.B.A., Knight director of strategy alignment, received a 2011 group merit award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for his role in developing AccrualNet, a web-based system designed to help researchers navigate the process for recruiting participants to NIH clinical trials. The NIH Director’s Award is a symbol of achievement in aiding the research community. The system should ultimately improve participation in clinical trials by making it easier for investigators to gather information as they plan to recruit eligible patients.

Rubinstein Scholars Receive National Honors
Three medical students in the OHSU Radiation Medicine Student Interest Group – Ruth White, Ph.D., Joshua Walker, Ph.D., and Leonel Kahn, B.S. – received the prestigious 2012 RSNA Research Medical Student Grants from the Research and Education Foundation of the Radiological Society of North America.

“This is especially notable in light of the challenging extramural grant funding environment that currently exists,” said Charles Thomas, M.D., professor and chair of the Department of Radiation Medicine. “Their unprecedented academic achievement which speaks to our commitment to training the next generation of leaders in academic radiation medicine.”

In recognition of their accomplishments and to provide further support for their work, the students were named as 2012 Rubinstein Radiation Medicine Research Scholars.

(L-R) Former OHSU President Peter O. Kohler, M.D.; Deanne Rubinstein; Joshua Walker, Ph.D.; Leonel Kahn, B.S.; Ruth White, Ph.D.; Dick Rubinstein
key information about genetic mutations in just four days—versus the months or years required by previous technologies—to provide important new data to identify which genes are causing the cancer in each individual patient. These genes can then be validated as the best targets for life-saving drug therapies.

Speed is an essential component of finding successful treatments for AML, the most common leukemia affecting adults, because this disease can progress very rapidly, often proving fatal in a period of only weeks or months if left untreated.

“We finally have the tools we need to decipher the AML genome more quickly and really understand the parts that are therapeutically relevant,” said Tyner. “If we know what protein is driving the cancer, we have the ability to target that protein and stop it.”

Tyner, who was recently promoted to assistant professor in the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, joined Dr. Brian Druker’s team in 2005 as a postdoctoral fellow. Their work continues to build upon the unprecedented success of Gleevec, the first drug to target cancerous cells while leaving healthy cells unharmed.

Since its development by Druker in 2001, Gleevec has transformed the treatment of chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), once considered a fatal disease, and has saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of patients around the world. Generous support from The Charles Engelhard Foundation and the George Ettelson Endowed Fund in Acute Myeloid Leukemia Research is providing important resources to accelerate the identification of gene targeted therapies for AML.

With the advent of the RAPID test and the new research that it generates, both Tyner and Druker believe that we are quickly approaching a time when AML patients will have treatments as effective as Gleevec has been for patients with CML.

“It took 30 years of study to identify the mutant gene that causes CML,” explained Tyner. “The RAPID screen will greatly accelerate our capacity to gather critical data to identify AML’s mutant genes—even though this leukemia is more complex from a genetic perspective. This information will lead to faster, better diagnosis and, most important of all, invaluable knowledge about which drugs will be effective and safe therapies for individual AML patients.”
Let’s cure cancer.
Eliminate breast cancer.
Prevent prostate cancer.
Stop lung cancer.
End Cancer As We Know It.

Hope begins here. At the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute, medical care providers and research teams are transforming how the world understands and fights cancer. Your investments help fuel the discoveries that bring new hope to cancer patients. Your gifts can change the world. Join us in our mission to end cancer as we know it. Please support the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute today.

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