

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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DAMON RUNYON-WALTER WINCHELL FOUNDATION NAMES UT SOUTHWESTERN'S HONGTAO YU AS A 1999 SCHOLAR

DALLAS—April 4, 1999—A cancer research foundation established by a famous radio broadcaster in honor of a renowned journalist will support UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas researcher Dr. Hongtao Yu with \$100,000 annually for his quest to halt runaway cell growth that leads to malignant tumors.

In naming Yu a 1999 Damon Runyon Scholar and providing him with the two-year grant, the Cancer Research Fund of the Damon Runyon-Walter Winchell Foundation will help him delve further into the workings of anaphase promoting complex (APC), which plays an integral role in cell division. Yu assumed his first faculty position when he joined UT Southwestern as an assistant professor of pharmacology in January. Yu, one of the first five endowed scholars recruited through a new UT Southwestern program for young scientists, is the Michael L. Rosenberg Scholar in Medical Research.

"The Damon Runyon Scholarship gives me an added ability to pursue creative investigation and to combine my many scientific interests," Yu said, the first UT Southwestern recipient of the prestigious grant. "The Damon Runyon-Walter Winchell Foundation has been very supportive ever since it funded my postdoctoral fellowship. In choosing scholars, its trustees evaluate the long-term potential of work in cancer research. I appreciate the confidence they have in my investigation of cell-cycle regulation."

APC degrades a class of molecules called anaphase inhibitors, which control cell division at an early stage of proliferation. If APC is activated, the brakes fail and cell multiplication may become overactive and cancer may form. Yu wants to find ways to regulate APC activity. This knowledge may enable him to develop an anti-cancer drug.

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Already he has found all eight genes that comprise APC, but now Yu must learn what they do. Understanding the activation process for APC and the structures of all the proteins involved in its cellular-communication pathway also is part of Yu's investigation.

He said that UT Southwestern is one of the best places for him to continue his research because of the integration of many fields of biomedical sciences and the support available.

"UT Southwestern's administration, top researchers and community supporters know how important it is to invest in young scientists," said Yu, who also will receive \$600,000 over a four-year period through the medical center's new Endowed Scholars Program in Medical Science. "The head start provided to me by Michael L. Rosenberg's support for the Scholars Program has been of great benefit." The Scholars Program is designed to give young scientists with great potential the opportunity to establish solid research that will propel them to the highest ranks of biomedical investigation for decades to come.

Dr. Alfred Gilman, chairman of pharmacology and a Nobel laureate, said, "Yu has some tremendous lines of research to pursue, excellent training and a great attitude. We are fortunate he chose to be part of the UT Southwestern faculty."

Yu earned his bachelor's degree at Peking University and his doctorate at Harvard University, both in chemistry, then completed a postdoctoral fellowship in biology at Harvard University.

The Damon Runyon-Walter Winchell Foundation began in 1946 when Winchell broadcast an appeal on his show for contributions to fight cancer after his good friend, writer Damon Runyon, died of the disease. In 1972 Winchell also succumbed to a malignancy. The fund has contributed more than \$100 million to support young scientists in their quest to vanquish the killer disease.

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