

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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CHILDREN'S CANCER FUND GRANTS SUPPORT FIVE UT SOUTHWESTERN RESEARCH PROJECTS

DALLAS – June 18, 2002 – The Children's Cancer Fund has awarded grants to UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas for five pediatric research projects, including one to reveal a genetic pathway that may cause childhood liver tumors and another to fine-tune pioneering radiosurgery on brain tumors in infants.

The group's donation of more than \$380,000 marks the Dallas group's first grants to specific research projects.

"The Children's Cancer Fund raises money to improve the lives and create changes that will allow future children with malignancies to achieve a cure with less pain and fear," said Virginia Cook, 2002 CCF board president. "We remain steadfast in our mission to give children their lives back."

Its donations, approaching \$6 million over its 20 years of supporting work at UT Southwestern and Children's Medical Center of Dallas, have been used on a broad front against childhood cancers. The donations have often attracted additional research support and helped recruit top-notch scientists.

"The Children's Cancer Fund continually astounds me with its donors' generosity, and now it is breaking new ground with these targeted grants aiming to deliver medical weapons against specific pediatric cancers," said Dr. George Buchanan, professor of pediatrics, director of UT Southwestern's pediatric cancer program within the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center and holder of the Children's Cancer Fund Distinguished Chair in Pediatric Oncology and Hematology, established by the group in 1993.

The grants provide:

- \$100,000 to confirm whether a suspected molecular pathway links aberrant genes to the development of hepatoblastoma, the most common liver tumor in children. Dr. Gail Tomlinson, associate professor of pediatrics, said the project will focus on a pathway of genes which may turn on and off in abnormal sequences during fetal development.

"Delaying or inhibiting one variant in the gene, *cyclinD1*, could be the key to preventing the disease in high-risk children," she said.

(MORE)

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- \$93,000 to profile various pediatric cancer tumors and their links to a DNA alteration that inactivates tumor-suppressor genes. A long-range goal is to determine whether reversing the process can lead to new gene therapies for tumors, said Dr. Adi Gazdar, professor of pathology.
- \$87,000 to isolate targeting peptides – strings of amino acids – that bind exclusively to T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia, an often-deadly malignancy in children. The goal is to use such peptides to deliver toxic compounds to kill leukemia cells while sparing normal cells, said Dr. Richard Scheuermann, associate professor of pathology.
- \$50,000 to help UT Southwestern continue to pioneer Accuray Cyberknife radiosurgery on brain tumors in infants. This precise, high-dose radiation therapy device, located at Zale Lipshy University Hospital, has been used for adults and older teen-agers, but has never before been studied in children under 3, said Dr. Daniel Bowers, assistant professor of pediatrics. The clinical trial will expand ongoing work led by Bowers and Dr. Cole Giller, associate professor of neurological surgery. They and associates have already adapted the technology for use on some brain tumors in infants. Accuray's robotic application of high-precision radiation surgery, Giller said, focuses brief but repeated high-dose radiation from multiple angles into small tumors.
- \$50,000 to help uncover the anti-tumor capacity and related toxicity of a newly discovered protein within a known molecular family of natural cancer killers. The protein, which binds to cancer cell surfaces, has a unique mechanism to induce programmed cell death. A key question is whether the new protein has toxic effects on healthy cells in addition to its effects on cancer cells, as occurs with some related compounds, said Dr. Preet Chaudhary, assistant professor of internal medicine and molecular biology.

“These new grants will help cancer specialists advance their efforts to treat childhood cancers successfully and, ultimately, to save thousands of young lives,” said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, UT Southwestern president. “The Children's Cancer Fund support over the last two decades has helped us make remarkable progress in conquering pediatric malignancies, and these latest gifts will enable us to continue these successes.”

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