

Media Contact: Debbie Bolles  
214-648-3404

[debbie.bolles@utsouthwestern.edu](mailto:debbie.bolles@utsouthwestern.edu)

## UT Southwestern scientist awarded \$450,000 grant for cancer research

DALLAS – Feb. 8, 2011 – Dr. Benjamin P. Tu, assistant professor of biochemistry at UT Southwestern Medical Center, has received a Rachleff Innovation Award from the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation.

Dr. Tu, who investigates how cell growth and proliferation are coordinated with metabolism in a cell, is one of five recipients selected to get the three-year, \$450,000 grants this year. The Runyon-Rachleff awards go to early-career scientists based on projects with the potential to significantly impact cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

“Dr. Tu has discovered a key mechanism by which carbon sources, such as glucose, signal cells to grow and divide. These studies were conducted in the model organism, baker’s yeast. His goal is to investigate these mechanisms in mammalian cells and determine whether such mechanisms can be exploited to selectively kill rapidly proliferating cancer cells,” said Dr. Yung S. Lie, scientific director of the New York-based foundation.

Dr. Tu’s research is exploring whether novel, unconventional metabolic strategies might prove highly effective for the treatment of a variety of cancers.

“I hope that our fundamental work using budding yeast will one day lead to new strategies for treating cancers,” said Dr. Tu. “I am very fortunate to have received this grant and I am very grateful for the foundation’s generous support of high-risk research.”

Dr. Steven McKnight, chairman of biochemistry at UT Southwestern, said the award is well-deserved.

“Dr. Tu is one of our most adventurous young scientists,” Dr. McKnight said. “He is studying an intriguing system wherein yeast cells rhythmically oscillate back and forth between reductive and respiratory metabolism. Instincts tell me that he is onto something special – I’m absolutely delighted that he was chosen to receive one of the highly competitive Damon Runyon awards.”

Dr. Lie said the awards support cancer research of “exceptionally creative thinkers” with “high-risk/high-reward” ideas who lack sufficient preliminary data to obtain traditional funding. Recipients are chosen by a scientific committee comprising leading cancer researchers who are

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themselves innovators.

Other grant winners for 2011 were Dr. Alexei A. Arvin, California Institute of Technology; Dr. James E. Bradner, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute; Dr. Matthew G. Vander Heiden, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Dr. Joshua E. Elias, Stanford University School of Medicine.

Dr. Tu received his bachelor's and master's degrees in chemistry from Harvard University, and his doctorate in biochemistry and biophysics at the University of California, San Francisco. He did postdoctoral research at UT Southwestern in the laboratory of Dr. McKnight and joined the faculty in 2007.

His other honors include a Packard Fellowship for Science and Engineering from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Award in Biomedical Sciences, a Sara & Frank McKnight Foundation Fellowship, an AAAS/Science/GE Healthcare Young Scientist Regional Award – North America, and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Predoctoral Fellowship in Biological Sciences.

The Rachleff Innovation Awards program is made possible through the support of the Island Outreach Foundation and Debbie and Andy Rachleff. Mr. Rachleff is president and CEO of Wealthfront Inc., a Palo Alto, Calif.-based investment firm.

Since its founding in 1946, the Runyon Foundation has invested more than \$235 million and has funded the research of more than 3,250 scientists.

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