

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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BRAIN TUMOR RESEARCHER HONORED BY COUNCIL

DALLAS — June 3, 1997 — Dr. Karen L. Fink, who studies the formation of brain tumors and applies what she has learned in the lab to her patients in the clinic, received the 1997 Distinguished Young Researcher Award given by the President's Research Council at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

"I feel very honored to receive this award for doing work that I truly enjoy," she said.

Fink is participating in clinical research projects that employ new strategies for combating usually fatal brain tumors. Gene therapy, anti-angiogenesis and novel chemotherapy are of increasing interest to physicians, who have had only limited success using traditional chemotherapy and radiation to prolong the lives of patients with brain tumors.

In one study involving gene therapy, surgeons remove as much of the cancerous tumor as possible and then insert a gene within the tumor. When the cells incorporate the gene, they produce thymidine kinase and become susceptible to the antiviral drug, ganciclovir. Ganciclovir then is given to the patient intravenously with the intention of killing the remaining brain cancer cells.

Another drug trial, for patients with lower-grade tumors, uses a promising new chemotherapy agent known as temozolomide to damage the rapidly dividing brain tumor cells. Fink also is involved in studies that attempt to slow the recurrence of brain tumors by inhibiting formation of new blood vessels by tumor cells or by inhibiting the enzymes that allow cancer cells to invade adjacent normal tissue.

While Fink also has studied cancer-causing genes in the laboratory, including P53 mutations, she gets particular satisfaction from her work with patients. "I appreciate the time I spend with patients, helping them learn about their diagnosis and the different options for

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treatment," she said. "By participating in a large variety of clinical research projects, I feel confident that we're offering patients access to the best in state-of-the-art treatments."

A native of St. Louis, Fink earned her medical degree and doctorate from Mayo Medical School and Mayo Graduate School in Rochester, Minn. She arrived at UT Southwestern in 1991, working as a neurology resident at Parkland Memorial Hospital. After completing her residency, Fink began a fellowship in neuro-oncology under the direction of Dr. Clifford Schold Jr., chairman of neurology and holder of the Dorothy Rogers Cullum Distinguished Chair in Neuro-Oncology. She joined the UT Southwestern faculty in May 1996.

The President's Research Council is an organization of community leaders who are interested in learning about and advancing medical research at UT Southwestern. Members are invited to four lectures annually given by UT Southwestern's research leaders and aimed at lay audiences. Membership fees are used to provide research support to new faculty investigators at the medical center.

Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of the medical center, said Fink's work is important for providing better treatments for brain tumor patients. "Dr. Fink is a superb example of a young researcher whose work holds great promise for the future," he said. "With this award from the research council, she will be able to initiate research projects that will rapidly bring her laboratory findings to the bedside for the benefit of patients."

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