It’s been an outstanding year. Rarely have so many successes occurred within a 12-month period, and I’m pleased to share the good news with our supporters.

NCI Comprehensive Status

In July, we proudly announced that we received the National Cancer Institute’s (NCI) Comprehensive Cancer Center designation. We have joined an elite group of only 45 centers across the nation with this designation, putting us among the nation’s top-tier cancer centers. Our cancer center is the first and only facility in North Texas to receive comprehensive status, and the second in the University of Texas System, joining MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

To achieve NCI comprehensive status, the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center had to:

- Demonstrate depth and breadth in laboratory research, clinical research, and population-based research;
- Demonstrate strength in transdisciplinary research that bridges scientific fields;
- Serve not only our regional area, but also the broader population through cancer research; and
- Integrate training and education of biomedical researchers and health care professionals.

The comprehensive status further delineates extraordinary efforts by these top-tier cancer centers for patient care, research, and technology, along with outreach efforts aimed at prevention and screening to help diagnose and assess cancer risks across.

Paradigm Shift in Cancer Care

The world was perceived as flat for hundreds of years, until one day it was shown to be round. Thanks to a new national clinical trial, our perception of cancer care may be about to undergo an equally substantial shift in thinking.

“It’s the wave of the future, and it’s here now. We will be treating patients not based upon tumor location, but by what caused the tumor,” said Dr. Joan Schiller, Deputy Director of the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center, Chief of the Division of Hematology and Oncology, and Professor of Internal Medicine.

The clinical trial is called the NCI-Molecular Analysis for Therapy Choice (NCI-MATCH) and is funded by the National Cancer Institute. It will analyze patients’ tumors to determine whether they contain genetic abnormalities for which a specific drug treatment exists. The treatment will then be based on the genetic abnormality, regardless of tumor type. For example, lung cancer patients may receive a drug proven effective for breast cancer, if both of their tumors have similar mutations.

Simmons Cancer Center is one of just 30 National Clinical Trials Network Lead Academic Participating Sites, many of which will take part in the NCI-MATCH trial.

NCI-MATCH investigators across the U.S. plan to obtain tumor biopsy specimens from as many as 3,000 patients initially. The specimens will undergo DNA testing to identify those that have genetic abnormalities that may respond to the targeted drugs selected for the trial. Researchers estimate that about 1 in 3 will qualify, which will result in a group of about 1,000 participants.

Adult patients from any ethnic group and with any type of cancer are eligible to enroll. “In order to test for these mutations, it needs to be fresh tissue, so it does require another biopsy. This can be invasive for some patients, and can make it challenging,” said Dr. Schiller.
Breast Cancer Survivors Gather at Annual Joanie Hatcher Memorial Survivor Symposium

The Joanie Hatcher Memorial Survivor Symposium is a popular event that many breast cancer survivors look forward to each year, giving them the chance to celebrate survival and hear about the latest in breast cancer research and tips for healthy living. This year’s keynote speaker was Dr. Sumert S. Teotia, Associate Professor of Plastic Surgery, who addressed “Artistry in Breast Reconstruction.” Dr. Teotia is Director of the Breast Reconstruction Program and works with the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center breast cancer care team – surgical oncologists, medical and radiation oncologists, physical therapists, psychologists, and geneticists.

“Breast reconstruction, our process is geared toward an aesthetic-based reconstruction, beginning with understanding how a patient appears preoperatively, what is encountered during mastectomy and reconstruction, and what possibilities exist to reach a maximum beautiful result,” said Dr. Teotia.

During his lecture, Dr. Teotia presented an overview of breast cancer reconstruction from the invention of implants in 1962 to recent techniques that use a woman’s own tissue from the stomach or thigh for reconstruction after a mastectomy. In addition to serving as an important educational forum, the Hatcher Symposium united more than 500 survivors in a celebration of life, and included a festive brunch, recognition of inspirational survivors, and a pink hat contest.

The annual event was established by Jim Hatcher in honor of his late wife, Joanie, and is organized by trustees of the Jim and Joanie Hatcher Charitable Trust, including Karee Sampson, Kay Porter, and Ann McCurdy. Since partnering with UT Southwestern, the Jim and Joanie Hatcher Charitable Trust has created an occasion for survivors to celebrate their survival and join together with researchers, clinicians, and therapists for interactive discussions on health and wellness topics of particular interest to breast cancer survivors.

“We are grateful for Jim Hatcher’s dedicated support of breast cancer survivorship and his vision for this annual symposium,” said Dr. James Willson, Director of the Simmons Cancer Center and Associate Dean of Oncology Programs. “Joanie Hatcher’s legacy enables survivors to gather every year to find mutual support and learn important breast health information.”

Jim and Joanie Hatcher were happily married for almost 35 years before breast cancer claimed Joanie’s life in August 1996. Throughout her battle, Joanie wanted to help others affected by breast cancer. Through the Jim and Joanie Hatcher Charitable Trust, Mr. Hatcher has carried out her wife’s wishes by generously supporting breast cancer care and survivorship programs, including gifts totaling $250,000 to UT Southwestern.

“I know it would mean the world to Joanie to see her legacy touch the lives of so many women who are battling breast cancer,” said Mr. Hatcher. “It is my true privilege to celebrate the survival of these remarkable women and do whatever I can to support them in their fight.”

CBS-11 anchor Karen Borta served as emcee for this year’s event. Following Dr. Teotia’s presentation, a panel of UT Southwestern breast cancer experts addressed questions from survivors in attendance on a broad range of issues. This year’s panel included: Dr. Barbara Haley, Professor of Internal Medicine; Dr. Marilyn Leitch, Professor of Surgery and Medical Director of the Center for Breast Care; Dr. Roshi Rao, Associate Professor of Surgery and Director of the George N. Bracken, M.D. Center for Breast Surgery; Dr. Nicholas Haddock, Assistant Professor of Plastic Surgery and Orthopaedic Surgery; Dr. Kim Barker, Assistant Professor of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; Dr. Jeff Kendall, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and the Clinical Leader of Oncology Supportive Services for the Simmons Cancer Center; Jeff Littler, Manager of Pharmacy Operations; Linda Robinson, Assistant Director of Cancer Genetics; and Beth Daniels, Occupational Therapist.

Dr. Haley holds the Charles Cameron Springer, M.D., Chair in Clinical Oncology. Dr. Leitch holds the S.T. Harris Family Distinguished Chair in Breast Surgery, named in her honor. Dr. Willson holds the Lisa K. Simmons Distinguished Chair in Comprehensive Oncology.

Achieving a Milestone in Bone Marrow Transplant

The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute (CPRIT) of Texas awarded the largest prevention grant in its history to UT Southwestern’s Moncrief Cancer Institute. The grant will cover colon cancer screening at no cost to the underserved in Tarrant and surrounding counties. During the initial programs, researchers at UT Southwestern and Moncrief learned that the target population includes those aged 50 and older who are not current with their screenings, and that this group includes Bosque, Clay, Comanche, Cooke, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Grayson, Hamilton, Hill, Hood, Jack, Johnson, Montague, Navarro, Palo Pinto, Parker, Somervell, Wise, and Young counties.

Researchers estimate that 4 out of every 5 uninsured adults in the grant area have not been screened. The award includes funding to navigate patients to follow-up care if needed.

The Adult Hematologic Malignancies/Blood and Marrow Transplantation Program at UT Southwestern's Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center completed its 1,000th bone marrow transplant in March. Physicians and staff are proud of the milestone and the cancer survivorship that it represents.

Dr. Robert Collins, Program Director and Professor of Internal Medicine, launched the initiative in 1998. He carefully designed the program from a blank slate, selecting and adopting the best practices and new technologies while developing new processes for training and service delivery.

“Our goal was to design a program that delivered very complicated therapy with excellence and compassion,” said Dr. Collins. In 17 years, he has seen significant improvements for patients with bone marrow and blood cancers. “We have the best one-year survival rate for allogeneic stem cell transplants among adult transplant centers in North Texas. Today’s treatments are less toxic and more effective, with lower mortality rates, and cause fewer side effects. People who are older, and those who are severely ill, can now be treated due to lowered toxicity.”

Dr. Collins holds the Sydney and L. H. Huffines Distinguished Chair in Cancer Research in Honor of Eugene Frenkel, M.D., and the H. Lloyd and Willye V. Skaggs Professorship in Medical Research.

CPRIT Awards Largest Prevention Grant

“The determined screening completion rate was twice as high for patients offered a simple, at-home test kit compared to colonoscopy,” said Dr. Keith Argenbright, Director of UT Southwestern’s Moncrief Cancer Institute, Professor of Clinical Sciences, and principal investigator of the expanded program. “That proves the adage: The best test is the test that gets done.”

In addition to support from the American Cancer Society and the Dallas-Fort Worth Hospital Council, the program is building a collaborative network of hospitals and clinics in the 20-county region to identify medically underserved patients age 50 and older who are not current with their screenings.

Along with Tarrant County, the grant will cover rural counties where Moncrief has been providing mammograms for the uninsured for several years. The area includes Bosque, Clay, Comanche, Cooke, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Grayson, Hamilton, Hill, Hood, Jack, Johnson, Montague, Navarro, Palo Pinto, Parker, Somervell, Wise, and Young counties.

Researchers estimate that 4 out of every 5 uninsured adults in the grant area have not been screened. The award includes funding to navigate patients to follow-up care if needed.

The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute (CPRIT) of Texas awarded the largest prevention grant in its history to UT Southwestern’s Moncrief Cancer Institute. The grant will cover colon cancer screening at no cost to the underserved in Tarrant and surrounding counties. During the initial programs, researchers at UT Southwestern and Moncrief learned that the target population includes those aged 50 and older who are not current with their screenings.

Researchers estimate that 4 out of every 5 uninsured adults in the grant area have not been screened. The award includes funding to navigate patients to follow-up care if needed.

The Adult Hematologic Malignancies/Blood and Marrow Transplantation Program at UT Southwestern’s Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center completed its 1,000th bone marrow transplant in March. Physicians and staff are proud of the milestone and the cancer survivorship that it represents.

Dr. Robert Collins, Program Director and Professor of Internal Medicine, launched the initiative in 1998. He carefully designed the program from a blank slate, selecting and adopting the best practices and new technologies while developing new processes for training and service delivery.

“Our goal was to design a program that delivered very complicated therapy with excellence and compassion,” said Dr. Collins. In 17 years, he has seen significant improvements for patients with bone marrow and blood cancers. “We have the best one-year survival rate for allogeneic stem cell transplants among adult transplant centers in North Texas. Today’s treatments are less toxic and more effective, with lower mortality rates, and cause fewer side effects. People who are older, and those who are severely ill, can now be treated due to lowered toxicity.”

Dr. Collins holds the Sydney and L. H. Huffines Distinguished Chair in Cancer Research in Honor of Eugene Frenkel, M.D., and the H. Lloyd and Willye V. Skaggs Professorship in Medical Research.

CPRIT Awards Largest Prevention Grant

“The determined screening completion rate was twice as high for patients offered a simple, at-home test kit compared to colonoscopy,” said Dr. Keith Argenbright, Director of UT Southwestern’s Moncrief Cancer Institute, Professor of Clinical Sciences, and principal investigator of the expanded program. “That proves the adage: The best test is the test that gets done.”

In addition to support from the American Cancer Society and the Dallas-Fort Worth Hospital Council, the program is building a collaborative network of hospitals and clinics in the 20-county region to identify medically underserved patients age 50 and older who are not current with their screenings.

Along with Tarrant County, the grant will cover rural counties where Moncrief has been providing mammograms for the uninsured for several years. The area includes Bosque, Clay, Comanche, Cooke, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Grayson, Hamilton, Hill, Hood, Jack, Johnson, Montague, Navarro, Palo Pinto, Parker, Somervell, Wise, and Young counties.

Researchers estimate that 4 out of every 5 uninsured adults in the grant area have not been screened. The award includes funding to navigate patients to follow-up care if needed.
In recognition of his lifelong work in lung cancer, the OncLive oncology resource network has named Dr. John Minna, Professor of Molecular Oncology Research and a Giant of Cancer Care. Dr. Minna is Director of the Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Center for Therapeutic Oncology Research, the WA. "Tex" and Deborah Moncrief Jr. Center for Cancer Genetics, and Co-Director of the Experimental Therapeutics Program at the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center.

This award recognizes 12 physicians nationwide for ground-breaking accomplishments in their field. Dr. Minna was selected by his peers for his highly influential work in translational (“bench-to-bedside”) lung cancer research.

This work started when Dr. Minna arrived at UT Southwestern in 1991 with his longtime collaborator Dr. Adi Gazdar, Professor in the Hamon Center for Therapeutic Oncology Research and of Pathology. Both researchers were formerly of the National Cancer Institute (NCI). The two have carefully developed and then curated lung cancer cell lines since the 1970s — a collection of about 300 that is now the world’s largest.

These cell lines are regularly tapped to develop and test new therapies by thousands of researchers worldwide. The early, intense focus on the biology of lung cancer put UT Southwestern at the forefront internationally of lung cancer research’s molecular revolution.

It also laid the foundation for the university’s research award in 1991, in collaboration with MD Anderson Cancer Center, of a highly competitive Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE) grant from the NCI. The grant, with annual funding of $2.5 million, leverages the talents of some of the world’s top lung cancer scientists, along with progress in genomics, to advance the dream of personalized medicine — not just through discovery, but with innovation that makes that discovery practicable.

“This is one of the few places in the world with the whole package — the clinical, surgical, medical, and radiation oncology expertise; the mechanisms to get the specimens into the lab and study them; and the comprehensive approach that involves biology and genetic and chemical analysis of the tumors,” said Dr. Minna, the program’s principal investigator.

Dr. Gazdar holds the W. Ray Wallace Distinguished Chair in Molecular Oncology Research. Dr. Minna holds the Max L. Thomas Distinguished Chair in Molecular Pulmonary Oncology, and the Sarah M. and Charles E. Scy Distinguished Chair in Cancer Research.

Dr. John Minna: Recognizing Decades of Dedication

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has awarded its highest designation to the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center, making it one of only 45 comprehensive cancer centers nationally and the only such facility in North Texas. Simmons Cancer Center is now one of two to achieve this honor in the University of Texas System, joining MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. The designation includes an $8.1 million grant for cancer center support.

A video that describes how the new designation supports patient care, population screening, and cancer research is available online at the newly launched cancer website, utswmedicine.org/cancer. Simmons Cancer Center has also launched a public awareness campaign named “Call Out Cancer” to educate the public about early detection and screening. According to the Texas Cancer Registry, more than 100,000 Texans are diagnosed with cancer every year.

“NCI-designated comprehensive cancer centers are among the most advanced in the world,” said Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky, President of UT Southwestern. “These centers conduct research that leads to new drugs and treatments aimed at improving patient care and, ultimately, saving lives. We are pleased to be among this distinguished group of cancer centers, and to have at UT Southwestern remarkable physicians and scientists who, each day, are working to conquer cancer.”

Initially established through the extraordinary contributions of Dallas philanthropists Harold C. and Annette Simmons and the Simmons family, the success of the center has been achieved in large part because of strong and ongoing support from the community. Added Dr. Podolsky. Mr. Simmons and his family have given and pledged more than $100 million to enhance cancer programs at UT Southwestern.

“The initial vision and continuing generosity of the Simmons family have been transformative in ensuring that cancer patients in North Texas and surrounding regions have access to the highest quality of care available anywhere in the country,” Dr. Podolsky said. “This new designation is grateful to those in our community who have supported the research, technology, and infrastructure that serve as the backbone for this achievement.”

Commenting on the NCI recognition, Mrs. Simmons said, “There is no better reinforcement of an investment in the cure for cancer than this very exclusive designation from the NCI. Our hope has always been that we could make a sustainable difference in the fight against this cruel disease, and the comprehensive designation paves the way for even greater advances in the treatment and cure of cancer. We are very proud of the dedicated members of the UT Southwestern team who have made this honor possible.”

First designated as an NCI cancer center in 2010, the Simmons Cancer Center has risen to the top tier in less than five years. “The differentiating benefit of comprehensive cancer centers is that they combine quality care with research and technology that advance the treatment and prevention of cancer,” said Dr. James Willson, Director of the Simmons Cancer Center and Associate Dean of Oncology Programs at UT Southwestern. “The NCI designation underscores our dedication to not only improving results in how we manage disease, but also to making an impact on the community in terms of early detection and management of cancer at its most curable stages.”

Partnerships with Parkland Health & Hospital System, Children’s Medical Center Dallas, the UT School of Public Health Dallas Regional Campus, and UT Southwestern’s Moncrief Cancer Institute in Fort Worth played an important role in achieving the comprehensive designation, said Dr. Willson.

Dr. Podolsky holds the Philip O’Bryan Simmons Distinguished Chair in Comprehensive Oncology. Dr. Willson holds The Lisa K. Simmons Distinguished Chair in Medical Science. Dr. Willson holds The Lisa K. Simmons Distinguished Chair in Comprehensive Oncology.

Most trials just test one drug and compare it to the standard treatment for that type of cancer. In NCI-MATCH, 20 to 25 drugs will ultimately be tested, each in a different arm of the trial. These drugs have all either been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for another cancer type, or are still being tested in other clinical trials but have shown some effectiveness against tumors with a particular genetic mutation.

The treatments will be considered promising if at least 16 percent of the patients in an arm of the study have tumor shrinkage. A secondary goal for the trial is six-month, progression-free survival. In addition, researchers will also determine how long it takes the cancer to progress and evaluate the side effects of the treatments.

“Ultimately, our major goal is overall survival. Looking at whether patients have progressed after six months of treatment is a much quicker end-point than waiting five years. We can report back after six months, which helps to further additional research,” said Dr. Schiller.

Dr. Schiller added a note of caution. While some tumors may respond initially, this doesn’t necessarily mean the patient is cured. There is a risk that some tumors will go on to form other mutations. This is the continual challenge and evolving nature of the NCI-MATCH trial, a paradigm shift in how cancer is treated could be a reality in as few as five years.

Dr. Schiller holds the Andrea L. Simmons Distinguished Chair in Cancer Research.

From the Director

Dr. James Willson

the broader population. That’s important because 5 to 10 percent of the population has genetically identifiable cancer risks. Clements University Hospital

Last November, we moved into our new oncology floor at William J. Clements Jr. University Hospital. This facility is more than just a new hospital. Designed with the involvement and input of hundreds of health care professionals, patients, and community friends of UT Southwestern, Clements University Hospital is a place where our missions of compassionate care, research, and education come together to serve our patients and advance human health.

Our physicians now operate in a state-of-the-art surgical facility and a Bone Marrow Transplant Unit that meets strict requirements for air filtration that are essential for these procedures. Since the new oncology floor opened, we have seen more than 1,000 cancer patients. Of these, over 300 underwent surgical procedures and 90 received bone marrow transplants.

Top Hospital Ranking

In August, UT Southwestern was recognized in U.S. News & World Report as having one of the top 50 cancer hospitals in the U.S. We are honored to be part of this top-tier group for cancer care. This is the first time Simmons Cancer Center has been recognized in this ranking, which is well-known among the general public. In awarding this recognition, the panel examined data for nearly 5,000 hospitals and results from surveys of more than 140,000 physicians to rank the best centers in 16 adult specialties, from cancer to urology.

The recognition from NCI and from U.S. News & World Report is a testament to the talents of our extraordinary cancer team. Thank you for your support as we continue to provide cancer care at the highest level.

Dr. James Willson, M.D.

Dr. Willson holds The Lisa K. Simmons Distinguished Chair in Comprehensive Oncology.

Simmons Achieves Elite Comprehensive Designation

Research News

National Cancer Institute News

Distinguished Chair in Cancer Research.

5

5

www.utsouthwestern.edu
Kevin Gardner, Adjunct Professor of Biochemistry and Chair of Biochemistry. Dr. Basic Research and Professor of Molecular Genetics was identified two decades ago by Dr. McKnight, which completed development of a drug to carry forward to clinical trials. With input from Dr. Courtney and others, Peloton designed and opened a phase one clinical trial to patients in 2014 at seven locations around the country, including UT Southwestern. Participants in the trial had already exhausted first-line treatments for kidney cancer without success, and turned to this clinical trial to help investigators and potentially future patients. The Peloton trial is designed to determine safe dosages of the drug, its efficacy will be determined in a future phase two trial.

"Translating the discovery made by Drs. McKnight and Russell to a potential clinical application, particularly when working with what many presumed to be an 'undruggable' target, is a remarkable achievement," said Dr. Courtney. "The question is, 'Will we be able to demonstrate some improvement in survival without excessive impairment of quality of life?'

The phase one trial that Dr. Courtney is leading at UT Southwestern is the next step in getting answers.

The study is sponsored by Peloton Therapeutics. Dr. Courtney is the site principal investigator at UT Southwestern. UT Southwestern and Drs. Russell, McKnight, Gardner, and Bruick have or had a financial relationship with Peloton Therapeutics in the form of consulting, advisory, or speaking compensation, editorial compensation, license or royalty compensation, or investment interest that makes the drug PTZ385 Tablets, a HIF-2 inhibitor, which is intended to block the action of a protein that is often overactive in clear cell renal cell cancer. It is possible that study results could lead to profit for the individual investigators and UT Southwestern. For more information regarding this study, contact UT Southwestern at 214-648-1242.

Dr. Bruick is a Michael L. Rosenberg Scholar in Biomedical Research. Dr. McKnight holds the Distinguished Chair in Basic Biomedical Research, and The Sam C. Winsted and F. Andrew Distinguished Chair in Biochemistry. Dr. Russell holds the Eugene McDermott Distinguished Chair in Molecular Genetics.
Join the Friends of the Comprehensive Cancer Center

The Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center is working diligently toward its mission to reduce the burden of cancer. A gift to join the Friends of the Comprehensive Cancer Center will support innovative and highly promising projects that directly impact cancer research and care. In addition to supporting the Simmons Cancer Center, members will enjoy educational benefits throughout the year. Annual memberships start at $500 for individuals or couples, and at $250 for Younger Friends up to age 40. We also welcome gifts of larger amounts, which will accelerate our goals.

Membership at the $250 level and above is recognized in UT Southwestern's Southwestern Medicine Annual Review. For more information, please call the Development Office at 214-648-2344.

Patient and Community Outreach Programs Available

Support groups are available at the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center, led by licensed social workers. Meetings are scheduled regularly for:

- Ovarian cancer
- Thoracic/lung cancer
- Husbands and partners of women with cancer
- Prostate cancer
- Breast cancer
- Brain cancer

For more information about patient-care services at the Simmons Cancer Center, please call 214-645-HOPE (214-645-4673) or toll-free, 866-460-HOPE (866-460-4673).

Cancer Connection is published by the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

Director – Dr. James Willson
Editor – Lori Sundeen Soderbergh