


CANCER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

The Mission of The Cancer Research Foundation Is To Help Find The Cures For Cancer Through Funding Laboratory and Clinical Research.

Cancer is a wild beast.

Originally it was viewed as a sick animal in that it was believed that its resilience to therapy was due to an instability in the genes of the abnormal cancer cells. A tumor was assumed to contain mutated cells that allowed it to resist any form of therapy thrown at it. If this hypothesis is correct, it is amazing that many human cancers contain all the necessary mutations to survive almost all treatments. Cure rates of many cancers have not significantly improved over the last decades (i.e. lung, pancreas, colon or ovarian cancer) despite intensive research efforts. And many of the improvements in patient survival are due to improved prevention, early detection methods or better surgical techniques.

In recent years a new theory has been emerging. This view of cancer suggests that it is not so abnormal as originally postulated. Cancer cells have an intriguing number of properties of normal embryonic cells. Most often patients die from cells called metastases, cells derived from a cancerous tumor, rather than from the original tumor itself. In order to form metastases, a cancer cell needs to undergo dramatic changes to become more mobile and invasive, enabling it to move to distant



Dr. Marcus Peter, Ph.D.

The Cancer Research Foundation is pleased to announce that Dr. Marcus Peter, Ph.D. has been awarded the 2008 Fletcher Scholar Award to pursue his research project titled: "Treatment of Cancer by Targeting its Embryonic Properties." This \$100,000 grant is funded by income earned by the Eugene and Dorothy Fletcher Memorial Endowment created to fund laboratory research in cancer and has been awarded biennially since 1989.

We are pleased to present Dr. Peter's description of the work he is planning to pursue with this grant.

sites in the bodies and form new tumors. This behavior is reminiscent of that of early embryonic cells, which also need to move to distant sites of the embryo to form new tissues such as organs or limbs. Indeed in recent years a number of genes (the genetic information contained in all cells) have been found to be expressed in embryonic cells that are absent in adult cells but are re-expressed in cancer cells.

So far these genes have not allowed us to explain the similar behavior of most cancers. But the similarity has led us to ask: How is this embryonic behavior regulated and is there a master regulator? We believe we have recently identified such a master regulator in form of a novel type of small molecule called let-7 expressed only in adult tissues but not in early embryos. These molecules belong to the class of micro ribonucleic acids (micro RNA) and we know that each micro RNA suppresses the expression of multiple other more conventional genes.

The let-7 molecule could therefore function as a master regulator. We have now identified a set of 12 genes regulated by let-7 (we call these genes which are turned on and off by let-7 and which are related to cancer and fetal development "let-7 regulated oncofetal genes" or "LOGs"), all of which are early embryonic genes expressed in cancer cells. But would cancer cells utilize such a master regulator?

As of last year we know that just 4 human genes introduced into a normal skin cell can transform the skin cell into an embryonic stem cell that can give rise to any cell type found in the body. If we can create an embryonic stem cell in a laboratory, then it is safe to assume that nature can do many similar tricks like this even better. It is therefore entirely possible that cancer cells can de-differentiate into stem-like cells and then differentiate again into many other cell forms,

(...continued on next page)

Cancer is a wild beast. *(Continued from the front page.)*

providing an explanation for the enormous plasticity of cancer and for its ability to deal with almost any therapy we have tried so far. Recently a loss of let-7 has been shown to be responsible for the drug sensitivity of cancer cells and loss of let-7 has also been found to render cancer cells resistant to drug treatment.

Cancer is a wild beast and not just a sick animal. This proposal is aimed at

characterizing that beast in order to defeat it. The idea is to use the master regulator let-7 to render cancer cells sensitive to chemotherapy. However, in order to tame or even defeat the beast one needs to first understand where it is drawing its strength from. This proposal will explore the activity of all the 12 LOGs individually to cause resistance to anti-cancer therapy with the goal to identify the ones to

target as part of a novel cancer therapy. In the future we plan to use the 12 LOGs to selectively target cancer cells by instructing the immune system to eliminate cancer cells expressing any of the LOGs. Our work has the potential to result in a cancer treatment that would allow many forms of cancer to be treated.

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(April 1, 2007 – March 31, 2008)

**Your donations help fund important laboratory and clinical research in cancer.
Every donation is very much appreciated and we can't thank you enough for your participation.**

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We would also like to thank those who so generously contributed to the Cancer Research Foundation through the 2007 Combined Federal, State and Workplace Campaigns.



In Memoriam

1940 – 2008

It is with great sadness that the Cancer Research Foundation mourns the passing of our past Executive Director, Sharon Swanson. Sharon was the Executive Director for the Cancer Research Foundation for almost 25 years and was critical to making the CRF the strong organization we are today. She was a wonderful, smart and funny woman who was always able to look on the bright side of life. A cancer survivor of more than four years, Sharon was a fierce advocate for the need for private funding for cancer research and enjoyed a close friendship with many donors as well as with current and past CRF researchers. On hearing the news of Sharon's passing, a number of people close to Sharon and the Cancer Research Foundation shared their memories of her:



Sharon was an ardent supporter of cancer research, and luminous friend to the cancer care and philanthropic community. I'm reminded how as a young (and overwhelmed by it all) investigator, Sharon welcomed me warmly to the CRF family; this long-standing relationship with Sharon and the CRF proved to be a turning point in my career, giving me the freedom to take my research in novel and promising directions. She leaves a powerful legacy. Michelle M. Le Beau, Ph.D., Director, Cancer Research Center, University of Chicago

For so many years, Sharon was the glue that held the CRF together and made it work. She was completely devoted to the mission of the Foundation and, particularly, to helping advance the careers of bright young scientists and physicians. Her passion was felt by all and she became an inspiration as she worked through her own cancer diagnosis with

determination and fortitude. We will miss her deeply. Richard L. Schilsky, M.D., BSD Chairman, Cancer & Leukemia Group B, University of Chicago

Sharon was the Executive Director for many years of the CRF. I worked with her for all those years, and she became very involved with the doctors we funded and loved and had a passion for her work. Whenever she visited the medical center for any reason, she made sure she made

time to meet with a doctor the CRF had funded. Sharon will be missed by our whole Board and on behalf of them I send my condolences to her husband Lloyd and her 2 daughters. Merle Goldblatt Cohen, Cancer Research Foundation President

We will all miss Sharon a great deal. In her honor a special fund has been established to support breast cancer research in the laboratory of Geoffrey Greene, Ph.D., one of Sharon's friends and a scientist whom Sharon greatly admired. As a breast cancer survivor, Sharon followed Dr. Greene's research studies closely. Gifts to the fund can be directed to the address below:

**Sharon Swanson Memorial Fund
The University of Chicago
Office of Medical Center Development
1170 E. 58th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
Attn: Nicole Genovese**



Our love and condolences go out to Lloyd, Sharon's husband, her two daughters, Cindy and Mary, and their whole family.

Of course Sharon would be the one holding the "Lance Fan" sign on the far right.

CANCER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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The Cancer Research Foundation received over \$595,000 in bequests during our last fiscal year ending March 31st, 2008. These special people remembered the CRF in the estates, allowing the Foundation to continue to fund important cancer research, and we would like to honor their generosity and remember them specially.

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If you would like help in adding the Cancer Research Foundation as a beneficiary in your will, please contact us at 312-630-0055.



You can support the Cancer Research Foundation in a number of ways, from asserting your support of the science we are funding to making a gift in honor or memory of someone special. Included with this newsletter is a pre-printed envelope, or we would be happy to process your donation either on the phone or

though our website at www.cancerresearchfdn.org. In addition, the Cancer Research Foundation is a part of many workplace campaigns and United Way Campaigns. If you do not see the CRF listed, you can simply write our name in the "Donor Option" section. The CRF has a number of other programs to support donations through V-DAC vehicle donation and Heartfelt Charity Cards. Information on these programs can be found on our website or by contacting our office.

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