Leonidas Platanias Named Interim Director

Leonidas Platanias, MD, PhD, has been named interim director of the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University, effective January 1, 2014.

Platanias, professor of Medicine-Hematology/Oncology, previously served as the Lurie Cancer Center’s deputy director. He arrived at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in 2002 as the Jesse, Sara, Andrew, Abigail, Benjamin and Elizabeth Lurie Professor of Oncology. Prior to joining the medical school, Platanias was the chief of the Division of Hematology/Oncology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In addition to his duties as interim director, he will continue his molecular biology and biochemistry research focused on signaling pathways in cancer cells.

“Leon has provided great leadership over the past decade, recruiting numerous faculty and helping build the Lurie Cancer Center’s international prominence,” said Eric G. Neilson, MD, vice president for Medical Affairs and Lewis Landsberg Dean at Feinberg. “As interim director, he will carry forward the Lurie Cancer Center’s reputation as one of the nation’s premier cancer research facilities.”

Saving Fertility Not a Priority at Most Cancer Centers

INFERTILITY IS consistently listed as one of the most distressing long-term side effects of cancer treatment for adolescents and young adults. Yet the leading NCI-designated comprehensive cancer centers — which should be leaders in fertility preservation — aren’t doing an adequate job of helping patients protect their fertility according to a new study led by Maria Clayman, PhD, assistant professor of medicine at Feinberg and a member of the Lurie Cancer Center.

Most of these centers around the country do not have policies or procedures in place to consistently identify which patients may be at risk for fertility loss, inform patients of this risk in a timely manner or refer them to fertility specialists, the study found. At the time of the study, there were 39 comprehensive cancer centers that treated adults.

“It can be shocking for patients to find out their fertility was affected when there were potentially options that exist that were not offered to them. These are the centers that are at the vanguard of research and have the most people and financial resources,” said Clayman. “This should be part of the exemplary cancer care patients get in these centers.”

Clayman noted that Kristin Smith, a Patient Navigator for fertility preservation sees cancer patients at the Lurie Cancer Center. The Oncofertility Consortium at Northwestern University is a national, interdisciplinary initiative designed to explore the reproductive future of cancer survivors.
Gene Shown to Regulate Cell Recovery from Stress

A GROUP OF INVESTIGATORS, including Lurie Cancer Center member, David Gius, MD, PhD, has discovered how an anti-aging gene directs the cellular response to DNA damage.

Published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the findings explain the role that sirtuin 2 (SIRT2) plays in regulating a cell’s ability to recover from stress. “The study suggests that sirtuin, which genetically and biochemically plays a role in directing the aging processes in mammals, also regulates the accumulation of DNA damage,” said Dr. Gius, professor in Radiation Oncology at Feinberg. “Without it, the damage continues to mount.”

The Gius lab is focused on the connection between aging, cellular metabolism and cancer. “As we get older, the DNA damage incurred in our cells increases. When that damage is greater than the cells’ ability to repair it, we show the effects of aging and eventually die,” Dr. Gius said. “We’re interested in exploring the processes that govern longevity in an effort to understand the genetics of aging and how it induces cancer.”

Clinical Trial of Personalized Vaccine for Brain Tumor Shows Promise

PATIENTS WITH recurrent glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) treated with an experimental vaccine made from the patient’s own resected tumor tissue showed an improved survival compared with historical patients who received the standard of care alone, according to an analysis of a phase 2 trial of this vaccine that was recently published in the journal Neuro-Oncology and accompanied by an editorial highlighting the importance of the trial.

A GBM took the life of former Senator Edward Kennedy in 2009. The most aggressive form of primary brain tumor, GBM tumors are often resistant to standard therapies and median survival is approximately three to nine months for a recurrent tumor.

“We are talking about fast-growing tumors that invade normal brain tissue and are very difficult to treat,” said the study’s lead author, Orin Bloch, MD, assistant professor in Neurological Surgery at Feinberg, and a neurosurgeon at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. “These tumors occur in up to 23,000 Americans annually, and are typically treated with surgical resection of the tumor followed by chemotherapy and radiation treatment.” Bloch is also a member of the Lurie Cancer Center and part of Northwestern Brain Tumor Institute.

This phase 2 trial enrolled 41 adult patients with recurrent tumors between 2007 and 2011. Each patient received an average of six doses of the HSPPC-96 vaccine. Following treatment, 90 percent of patients were alive at six months and 30 percent were alive after one year. Further study will be needed to see if this vaccine could potentially be approved to treat recurrent brain tumors. Currently there are only a few approved therapeutic cancer vaccines, none of which are approved for the treatment of GBM.
Discovery May Aid Treatment of Rare Blood Disorder

NORTHWESTERN MEDICINE scientists have discovered a potentially new approach to treating a rare but devastating bone marrow disorder. Fanconi anemia (FA) is an inherited blood condition caused by a mutation in a cluster of proteins responsible for DNA repair.

“These patients develop anemia – a decrease in red blood cells – low white blood cell counts and bone marrow failure, usually in late childhood,” said Elizabeth Eklund, MD, professor in Medicine-Hematology/Oncology at Feinberg and a member of the Lurie Cancer Center. The average life expectancy of an individual with the disorder, which occurs once in every 350,000 births, is 20-30 years. Children with Fanconi anemia who do not experience bone marrow failure frequently develop acute myeloid leukemia in adolescence or as young adults.

What Liping Hu, a postdoctoral fellow, and others in Eklund’s lab uncovered is that when mice with the disorder were asked to fight off infectious or inflammatory challenges, the result was an acceleration of bone marrow failure and leukemia. “This study suggests that protecting Fanconi anemia patients from repeated infections might delay bone marrow failure or progression to leukemia,” said Eklund.

Cancer Survivorship Institute at the Lurie Cancer Center

THANKS TO BREAKTHROUGHS in cancer screening, treatment and research, more patients diagnosed with cancer will live long, rewarding lives. For many patients and families, these triumphs bring new challenges. The Cancer Survivorship Institute (CSI) at the Lurie Cancer Center will serve as a nexus at the intersection of state-of-the-art clinical care and transformative cancer survivorship research, bringing clinicians and scientists together to develop innovative and impactful programs.

The CSI’s patient-centered approach to survivorship provides comprehensive supportive oncology services during and after treatment, including psychosocial services, rehabilitative and integrative medicine, and palliative care. Specialized medical clinics address concerns of specific groups of cancer survivors. The clinics are closely aligned with the Cancer Control and Survivorship (CCS) research program, which studies survivorship-related issues ranging from biological mechanisms, measurement and intervention science, to population health. Closely aligning our research program and clinical care via the CSI will further enhance exceptional patient care and translational survivorship research.

“The unique medical and psychosocial needs of cancer survivors should be managed in the context of a long-term comprehensive, holistic and evidence-based approach in conjunction with investigations spanning from basic mechanisms to translational and community research models. The CSI incorporates these clinical and research efforts seamlessly to improve the lives of cancer survivors, their families and the community,” said CSI Director, Frank Penedo, PhD.

The CSI’s Medical Director, oncologist Sheetal Kircher, MD, will oversee all programmatic aspects of survivorship-related medical care in the Lurie Cancer Center’s Specialty Survivorship Clinics. These clinics provide specialized services across diverse cancer patient populations, including treatment summaries and care plans monitoring for possible late-effects of treatment. Patients are also offered tools to help manage physical and practical concerns, and strategies to optimize their health.

A Special Reception Honoring Steven Rosen, MD

Please join us in recognizing Dr. Rosen’s many contributions to Northwestern and the international cancer research community, and wishing him success in his new role at City of Hope.

Wednesday, January 29, 2014
4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Remarks by Dr. Rosen at 6 p.m.
Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Feinberg Pavilion, 3rd Floor Conference Center

RSVP to cancer@northwestern.edu or call 312.695.1300
Summer Research Opportunities for Students

TRAINING THE NEXT generation of clinicians and scientists is at the foundation of the Lurie Cancer Center’s mission. Our summer research programs give students the opportunity to learn and become active participants in cancer research. The hope is that these new experiences will inspire students to consider health and science-related careers.

PS-OC (Physical Sciences-Oncology Center) programs are available for underserved college students, as well as Northwestern University undergraduate and medical students.

The CURE (Continuing Umbrella of Research Experience) program offers underserved undergraduate students the opportunity to participate in laboratory summer research experiences.

The Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University and Northeastern Illinois University Cancer Health Disparities Research Program is offered to Northeastern Illinois University undergraduate students interested in pursuing careers in social science and health care.

Applications for the PS-OC and CURE Summer Research Programs are now available, with application deadlines in March 2014.

The application for the Health Disparities Research Program will be available in March 2014.

CRO Welcomes Sara Duffey as Clinical Research and Education Specialist

SARA DUFFEY is the Lurie Cancer Center’s new Clinical Research and Education Specialist, providing information about clinical trials and related resources to patients, referring physicians and community groups.

In this role, Duffey will focus on developing and distributing educational materials for minority and underrepresented patients and their families. In addition, she’ll work closely with the Lurie Cancer Center’s Office of Equity and Minority Health to support their existing community partnerships and help expand their outreach initiatives.

Duffey graduated from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2002, with a BA in Psychology. Since joining Northwestern in 2004, she has worked with the Clinical Research Office, coordinating a wide range of hematology/oncology clinical trials, managing data and assisting with protocol development. She looks forward to the prospect of combining her long-time interest in both medical research and patient education.

Contact Sara Duffey at 312.695.1102 or cancertrials@northwestern.edu

Matthew Ruchin Named Interim Associate Director for Administration

MATTHEW RUCHIN assumed the role of interim associate director for administration for the Lurie Cancer Center on January 2, 2014. As senior grants and contracts administrator, Ruchin was integrally involved in the preparation of the Lurie Cancer Center’s 2013’s competing NCI Cancer Center Support Grant, and worked closely with former associate director for administration, Timothy Volpe to prepare for a smooth transition following his retirement.

Contact Matt Ruchin at 312.695.4117 or mruchin@northwestern.edu
Alberto De Hoyos, MD, associate professor in Thoracic Surgery at Feinberg, has been invited to participate in the American Lung Association’s Lung Cancer Expert Medical Advisory Panel. The Expert Panel is designed to examine and provide strategic advice on critical lung cancer matters and lung cancer-related issues.

Sarika Jain, MD, assistant professor in Hematology/Oncology at Feinberg, received the 2014 Dixon Translational Research Young Investigator Award from Northwestern Memorial Foundation and the NUCATS Institute for her research project, “Intratumoral Injection of Clostridium Novyi-NT Spores in Advanced Breast Cancer.”

Dimitri Krainc, MD, PhD, chair of the Ken and Ruth Davee Department of Neurology at Feinberg, was invested as the Aaron Montgomery Ward Professor of Neurology.

Alfonso Mondragon, PhD, professor of Molecular Biosciences at the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, has been named Co-Director of the Northwestern Synchrotron Research Center at Argonne National Laboratory. He will be responsible for the Life Sciences Collaborative Access Team (LS-CAT).

Andrew Parsa, MD, PhD, chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery, was invested as the Michael Marchese Professor of Neurological Surgery.

John Salsman, PhD, research assistant professor in Medical Social Sciences at Feinberg, and Kristin Smith, Patient Navigator for Fertility Preservation, have joined the Board of Directors of True North Treks, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting young adult cancer survivors by connecting with nature and other survivors. Both Salsman and Smith are members of the Lurie Cancer Center’s AYA Oncology Working Board.

Kristin Swanson, PhD, professor in Neurological Surgery at Feinberg, received the 2014 Dixon Translational Research Innovation Award for her research project, “Patient-Specific Mathematical Modeling of Pediatric High Grade Gliomas.” The grants are awarded to Northwestern investigators for highly innovative, multi-disciplinary clinical and translational research collaborations that accelerate the identification of new treatments to improve human health.
THE LURIE CANCER CENTER is committed to educating the public about cancer prevention and treatment, and offers a wide range of community events and patient programs throughout the year. Below is a list of programs scheduled through November 2013.

LEARN MORE AND REGISTER AT cancer.northwestern.edu or call 312.695.1390

Leukemia Research Foundation Free Annual Town Hall Meeting

Sunday, January 26, 2013
Hilton Chicago / Northbrook
Northbrook

A panel of experts, including Lurie Cancer Center oncologist, Shira Dinner MD, will answer questions about leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, and myelodysplastic syndromes at this free program for patients and families.

Pink Zone Basketball Game for Breast Cancer Survivors

Saturday, February 15, 2014
Northwestern's Welsh-Ryan Arena
Evanston

Tickets are free for breast cancer survivors to cheer on the Northwestern University Women’s Basketball team at a game dedicated to raising breast cancer awareness. Tickets for friends and family are $3 each.

Cancer Connections

Saturday, March 22, 2014
Feinberg Pavilion, 3rd Floor, Conference Room A

Offered quarterly, this series of public education events is dedicated to improving the quality of life for patients, their families and caregivers—during and after cancer treatment. In addition to workshops on a wide range of topics, the program offers a chance to discover integrative therapies, networking groups, and peer support programs.
Professional Programs

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, the Lurie Cancer Center offers professional education on various cancer related topics. Below is a list of programs scheduled through November 2013.

LEARN MORE AND REGISTER AT cancer.northwestern.edu or call 312.695.1391

Staffileno Family Head and Neck Cancer Dental Symposium
January 17, 2014
Feinberg Pavilion, Mecklenburg Conference Room
Planning Committee: Mark Agulnik, MD; Mark Hutten, DDS; Bharat Mittal, MD; Harold Pelzer, MD, DDS; Samir Sejpal, MD

George Assimos Memorial Lecture
January 21, 2014
Feinberg Pavilion, Conference Room A
Speaker: Louis Staudt, MD, PhD

Molecular Aging Program:
Mitochondria as Signaling Organelles Regulating Aging
January 22, 2014
Robert H. Lurie Medical Research Center, Baldwin Auditorium
Speaker: Navdeep S. Chandel, PhD

Breast Cancer Review:
Updates from the 2013 San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium
February 14, 2014
Feinberg Pavilion, Mecklenburg Conference Room
Chair: William Gradishar, MD

Pamela Katten Memorial Leukemia Lectureship:
February 25, 2014
Feinberg Pavilion, Conference Room A
Speaker: Catriona Jamieson, MD, PhD
Director for Stem Cell Research
UCSD Moore Cancer Center

ASH Updates:
Current Trends in Leukemia, Lymphoma and Myeloma
February 28, 2014
Prentice Women's Hospital, Conference Room L
Chair: Leo Gordon, MD

Gastrointestinal Malignancies:
2014 Update of Clinical Care
March 7, 2014
Feinberg Pavilion, Conference Room A
Chair: Mary Mulcahy, MD

Grand Rounds & Tumor Cell Biology

GRAND roundS
Fridays: 8:00 a.m. to 9:00a.m
Robert H. Lurie Medical Research Center
303 E. Superior, Chicago
Gray Conference Room (unless otherwise noted)

Presented by the Division of Hematology/Oncology and the Lurie Cancer Center, the weekly Grand Rounds update physicians and healthcare personnel on developing trends and techniques in medicine.

Schedule at cancer.northwestern.edu/grandrounds

TUMOR CelL BIOLOGY

Thursdays: 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Robert H. Lurie Medical Research Center
303 E. Superior, Chicago
Baldwin Auditorium (unless otherwise noted)

The Tumor Cell Biology Seminars present weekly updates on novel translational cancer research in the areas of tumor biology, biomedical informatics and cancer prevention and diagnosis.

Schedule at cancer.northwestern.edu/tcb

If you would like to receive weekly reminders about the Grand Rounds and/or TCB Seminar schedules please contact Denise Marshall at d-marshall4@northwestern.edu.

Cancer & Fertility Virtual Grand Rounds

The Oncofertility Consortium has created a series of Virtual Grand Rounds, primarily for the clinical community, to increase reproductive education among oncology and reproductive providers. Learn more about how specific chemotherapeutic drugs and radiation treatments used to treat brain cancer, can impact fertility. Providers can also get information about the latest fertility preservation options, get access to reproductive specialists in their region, and receive free CME credits through this program, which is accessible via computer or mobile device.

Illinois oncology providers interested in connecting with other providers and reproductive specialists in the Illinois area can participate in the Consortium’s pilot program to increase oncofertility communication and education.

E-mail Brigid Martz at brigid.martz@northwestern.edu or call her at 312.503.2506 to learn more.

View the Oncofertility Virtual Grand Rounds Schedule at http://oncofertility.northwestern.edu/media?tid=33
Funding Opportunities

Travel Grants

Announcement of November 2013
Travel Fellowship Awards Recipients

The Katten Muchin Rosenman Travel Scholarship Program (KMR), the Center for Genetic Medicine Travel Fellowship (CGM) and the Cancer Prevention and Control Travel Scholarship Program (CP) Review Committee would like to congratulate the following Travel Fellowship Awards recipients:

Graduate Students
- Lauren Albrecht (KMR)
- Julian Klosowiak (KMR)
- Alaina Schlinker (KMR)
- Sarah Sirajuddin (CP)
- Elizabeth Tarasewicz (KMR)
- Mrinal Shad, PhD (KMR)
- Benjamin Thompson, MD, PhD (KMR)

Post-Doctoral Students
- Bong Jin Hong, PhD (KMR)
- Hongjian Jin, PhD (KMR)
- James Brandon Parker (KMR)
- Saleemulla Mahammad, PhD (CGM)
- Mark Manzano, PhD (KMR)
- Sania Raza, MD (CP)
- Benjamin Thompson, MD, PhD (KMR)

Each of these travel programs provide $750 to recipients to help defray the cost of travel and registration fees to a scientific meeting where the awardees will present their research.

The next deadline to apply for 2013 Travel Fellowship Awards is Friday, March 7, 2013.

See cancer.northwestern.edu/travel for details about the grant and application process

Basic Sciences Research Division

H Foundation Incentive Awards provide funding for faculty who have submitted and received a score on a RO1 grant to the NCI for the first time in their career. If additional funds are available, awards will be made to other faculty for new, first-time NCI RO1 submissions, which are scored but not yet funded.

H Foundation Bridge Awards provide up to $20,000 of support for competing renewals of NCI-sponsored RO1 research that missed the payline.

Applications for H Foundation Incentive and Bridge Awards are reviewed on a rolling basis and accepted until funds for the year are expended.

See cancer.northwestern.edu/research_funding

Lea Charitable Trust Equipment Grants

Through the generous support of the Lea Charitable Trust, a pool of funds is available to full members of the Lurie Cancer Center affiliated with one of the Basic Sciences Research Programs for use by multiple investigators or to support small equipment grants for collaborative research projects.

Lea Charitable Trust Equipment Grants are made on a rolling basis as funds become available.

See cancer.northwestern.edu/research_funding

Big Ten Cancer Research Consortium (BTCRC) Applications for Oncology Trial Concepts

The BTCRC is actively seeking concepts for highly translational oncology trials that leverage the scientific and clinical expertise of Big Ten Universities. Once submitted, the concepts will be discussed via a clinical trial working group mechanism. The proposed studies can be Phase II or earlier and must include a translational component. Collection of PBMCs, serum, plasma, and tumor tissue is mandatory.

Concepts will be accepted on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Additional requirements and contact information are described in the BTCRC RFA.
NEW MEMBER

Samman Shahpar, MD is instructor in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. His primary research interest involves the functional outcomes of cancer survivors. Dr. Shahpar has been working on a study funded by the ABTA assessing the outcomes and cost of day rehabilitation in malignant brain tumor patients, and is currently working the Lurie Cancer Center’s adult and pediatric neuro-oncology teams to develop a pilot program for assessing patient-reported and functional outcomes in the brain tumor population. He is also interested in the feasibility of rehabilitation interventions throughout the continuum of cancer survivorship.

Contact Dr Shahpar at 312.238.1000 or s-shahpar@northwestern.edu

NEW STAFF

Elizabeth Bacon
Data Assistant 2
Clinical Research Office
ElizabethBacon2016@northwestern.edu

Amelia Cobbs
Senior Research Technologist
Mouse Histology and Phenotyping Laboratory
amelia.cobbs@northwestern.edu

Marco Colamonici
Research Technologist 2
Platanias Lab
marco.colamonici@northwestern.edu

Katie Lewitt
Research Administrator
Business Operations
klewitt@northwestern.edu

Jennifer Nam
Research Project Manager
Clinical Research Office
jennifer-nam@northwestern.edu

Katherine Nichols
Quality Assurance Monitor
Clinical Research Office
katie-mccarthy@northwestern.edu

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Sign up to have news from the Lurie Cancer Center for oncology professionals delivered to your inbox. Email Jennifer Bowker at j-bowker@northwestern.edu

Lurie Cancer Center
Office of Public Affairs and Communications
676 N. St. Clair
Suite 1200
Chicago, IL 60611
312.695.1304

Interim Director
Leonidas Platianias, MD, PhD

Director,
Public Affairs and Communications
Sharon Markman

Interim Associate Director, Administration
Matthew Ruchin

Managing Editor
Jennifer Bowker

Help Wanted:
Reporters

PLEASE SEND SUGGESTIONS for this newsletter to Jennifer Bowker, j-bowker@northwestern.edu

Lurie Cancer Center Weekly Updates

INFORMATION TO BE CONSIDERED for inclusion in the Lurie Cancer Center’s weekly e-mail updates must be received at least one week in advance. Submit suggestions to Denise Marshall at d-marshall4@northwestern.edu.