IU School of Medicine
SCOPE

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IUSM home to new NIDDK core center

IUSM now will be home to one of the nation's first Core Centers of Excellence in Molecular Hematology. The center is being established through a $4.7 million grant from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease.

The grant will support basic research and the application of this research to clinical trials using gene therapies for childhood leukemias, adult and child cancers, and a variety of genetic blood diseases and metabolic disorders.

Two other core centers are being established at the same time at Boston Children's Hospital/Harvard University and the Fred Hutchison Cancer Research Center.

IUSM's new grant will support shared "high-tech" facilities, also called cores, to be used by many researchers as they work to uncover the underlying causes of blood and blood-related diseases and bring new treatments to the patient's bedside.

The five cores within the new IUSM Core Center of Excellence in Molecular Hematology Center are the Stem Cell Laboratory Core, the Vector Production Facility Core, the Mouse Core, the Cell Molecular Biology Core and the Gene Therapy Working Group Core.

"These cores are both mature versions of existing facilities supported by a previous NIDDK grant and extensions of those facilities to further support the development of gene transfer technology into human trials," says David A. Williams, MD, director of the new molecular hematology center.

Edward Srour, PhD, is co- director of the new center. In the Stem Cell Lab Core, directed by Rafat Abonour, MD, blood and bone marrow samples are processed and stem cells can be isolated and manipulated for human trials.

The Vector Production Facility Core, directed by Kenneth Cornetta, MD, produces genetically engineered viruses that can be used as vehicles to deliver human gene therapy.

A special strain of mice, which are so immunodeficient that researchers can put human blood into them to study human blood diseases, is the most important aspect of the Mouse Core directed by Wade Clapp, MD.

The Cell and Molecular Biology Core, directed by Mark Kelley, PhD, analyzes samples from various clinical trials at a molecular level.

The unique Gene Therapy Working Group Core, directed by James Croop, MD, is comprised of physicians, scientists and others who meet weekly to review ongoing gene therapy trials and ideas, as well as pre-clinical studies leading to new gene therapy trials.

Initially the center is focusing on three gene therapy trials - two in cancer and one for a rare genetic disorder, chronic glanulomous disease.

In an ongoing cancer trial, Dr. Abonour is using fragments of fibronectin, a genetically engineered human protein, to enhance the transport of a retrovirus into normal bone marrow cells of patients with advanced germ cell malignancies who have failed conventional treatment.

A second gene therapy trial, targeting brain tumors in adults and children, recently got under way. In this trial, the blood stem cell is modified genetically in an attempt to make it resistant to the toxic effects of a specific chemotherapy agent previously shown useful in treating brain tumors.

Gene therapy for CGD, a rare genetic defect that leaves patients susceptible, often with fatal results, to a common fungus called aspergillus is in its early stages and its first patient has been enrolledt. Mary Dinauer, MD, PhD, previously developed a mouse that has the same defect and successfully cured the mouse with gene therapy. The Center for Molecular Hematology now supports gene therapy trials for to attempt to cure CGD in humans.

Two additional molecular hematology clinical trials are already planned. One directed by Dr. Croop seeks to correct a rare genetic blood disorder of children called Fanconi anemia.

The other upcoming trial, directed by Franklin Smith, MD, will continue his work on ex-vivo cord blood expansion for patients with leukemia and various cancers.

BRIEFS

Search committee

Robert Holden, MD, dean of IUSM, has announced his intention to retire during the summer of 2000, before the start of the upcoming academic year.

Dr. Holden was appointed dean on Nov. 1, 1995. His desire to have a new dean in place to guide the school throughout the academic year has prompted him to retire before his fifth anniversary as dean is celebrated.

Gerald Bepko, chancellor of IUPUI, has appointed a search and screen committee and a separate advisory committee, both of which will play key roles in the process of selecting the next IUSM dean. Richard Schreiner, MD, is chair of the search and screen committee. Comments or questions concerning the search process should be addressed to Dr. Schreiner in care of the Office of the Search Committee, Fesler Hall 302. The telephone number at that office is 274-7810.

Since the school of medicine and its programs are supported by a diverse group of interests, Chancellor Bepko appointed more than the routine search committee to conduct the search.

Honors

David Posey, MD, was chosen as the first Daniel X. Freedman Fellow (1999-2000) at the Institute of Psychiatric Research of the Department of Pyschiatry. He recently completed a fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Virginia Caine, MD, and **Ora Pescovitz,** MD, have been honored in this year's selection of "Influential Women in Indianapolis" by the Indianapolis Business Journal and The Indiana Lawyer.

Christine Kirkendol, MS IV, has been elected to serve as the vice speaker of the American Medical Association - Medical Student Section Assembly.

Susanne Ragg, MD, PhD, is the first winner of a National Childhood Cancer Foundation fellowship established by the family of William Kennedy. Dr. Ragg, who will do her work at Riley Hospital, will be introducing chemotherapy-resistant genes into bone marrow cells in order to study ways to limit the toxicity of intensive chemotherapy treatments.

A. Michael Sadove, MD, has been elected president of the Indiana Chapter of the American College of

Surgeons at the group's annual meeting in August.

Informatics clerkship offered

Fourth-year medical students now have the opportunity to refine their research skills by taking a one-week rotation in Medical Informatics.

Designed by the faculty of the Ruth Lilly Medical Library in collaboration with the Regenstrief Informatics fellows, the rotation emphasizes lifelong learning skills such as locating and critically appraising the best clinical evidence in the literature.

The MI clerkship rounds out a month-long rotation, which includes Anesthesiology and Ophthalmology.

Now, in its second year, the MI clerkship has received high marks from students; it was ranked No. 1 among all clinical rotations. More information may be found at http://www.medlib.iupui.edu/informatics, or by contacting clerkship co-directors Fran Brahmi (fbrahmi@iupui.edu) and Sue London (slondon@iupui.edu).

Come join the celebration for the IUCC Center

IUSM faculty, staff and students are invited to join in the celebration for IU Cancer Center on its National Cancer Institute designation. Hors d'oeuvres and entertainment will be provided from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 27, in the Van Nuys Medical Science Building atrium.

Submissions to Scope

Scope wants your news items.

There are three easy ways to submit story ideas or information to SCOPE:

- -- fax the information to 278-3502;
- -- e-mail the information to mhardin@iupui.edu;
- -- or mail the information to Mary Hardin, LO 401, IUPUI.

The deadline for copy is 8:30 a.m. Mondays, the week prior to publication.

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http://www.medicine.indiana.edu
