

CWRU doc at front of cancer study

By JEFF STACKLIN

Dr. Nathan Berger knows the realities of cancer and aging: The disease is terribly common in people over 65, yet the research into how cancer afflicts older patients has been scarce.

Dr. Berger, former dean of the Case Western University School of Medicine and currently a professor of experimental medicine at CWRU, will play a part in changing the trend and possibly finding new treatment methods for cancer among older patients.

He will lead a five-year study at CWRU and its affiliated medical institutions to investigate how cancer cells develop in older patients and how patients react to cancer treatments. Dr. Berger said the study will involve physicians and scientists from the Ireland Cancer Center, a joint cancer research center of CWRU and University Hospitals of Cleveland.

The study will be financed with a \$3.3 million grant made jointly by the National Cancer Institute and National Institute of Aging. The university and its affiliated institutions, including UH and the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Cleveland, also will contribute \$1.3 million toward the research.

Part of the NIH and local money will enable CWRU to recruit up to five geriatric oncology researchers to the School of Medicine, Dr. Berger said. The first of the researchers will be on staff next year.

In addition to hiring researchers, the program seeks to bring together current faculty and staff for collaborative research efforts, said Dr. Jerome Kowal, professor of geriatric medicine at CWRU. The university and UH at present have 200 cancer researchers and 50 geriatric medicine researchers.

Researchers involved in the study will host seminars on geriatric oncology in order to share findings of their fellow researchers at the School of Medicine. In addition, CWRU next year will host a conference with experts in the field from around the world .

Dr. Kowal said the field of geriatric medicine, at about 25 years old, is, ironically, a relatively young medical field compared with pediatrics or oncology.

"Geriatricizing" other fields of medicine is a goal of the study, Dr. Kowal said. Typically, medical students pursue other, more attractive fields of medicine, he said. Combining geriatrics with oncology will produce new perspectives from researchers who typically would not pursue geriatric medicine, Dr. Kowal said.

A facet of the research will be the opening of clinical trials to older patients, Dr. Berger said.

- Courtesy of Crain's Cleveland Business