

## Case Comprehensive Cancer Center receives \$3.3 million to integrate cancer and aging research

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For more information, contact George Stamatis at 216-368-3635 or [george.stamatis@case.edu](mailto:george.stamatis@case.edu)

CLEVELAND—The Case Western Reserve University Comprehensive Cancer Center has been awarded a \$3.3 million grant from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the National Institute of Aging (NIA) to integrate aging and cancer research over a broad spectrum of basic and clinical sciences, and study the impact of age and aging on the basic biology and clinical course of cancer.



**Nathan A. Berger**

During the next five years, Nathan A. Berger, M.D., the Hanna-Payne Professor of Experimental Medicine and principal investigator for the grant, along with co-investigator Jerome Kowal, M.D., the Amasa B. Ford Professor of Geriatric Medicine, will coordinate collaborative efforts between cancer and aging researchers from the Case School of Medicine, College of Arts and Sciences and the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing.

Studies will be carried out in association with University Hospitals of Cleveland, the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center and the MetroHealth System to investigate cancer prevention, detection and treatment in elderly patients. Studies will consist of clinical trials to examine the efficacy and tolerance of new therapeutic regimens in older patients, and to evaluate side effects of therapy when they occur along with other conditions commonly found in older patients. Fundamental research will be conducted to examine the biology of aging and cancer.

In addition to direct support for research, the grant will fund the operation of core facilities to provide technical support for these programs and for recruitment of new faculty members. Funding also will be used to support conferences and meetings with noted experts to examine and plan new approaches to cancer in the elderly. Training

programs will be developed to provide oncologists with clinical skills and knowledge so that they will be better prepared to care for older patients with cancer.

Specific research projects to be funded in the first year of the grant include Age Related Changes in Brain Tumor Biology; Regulation of Clusterin (a DNA repair protein) in Cancer and Aging; Pharmacokinetics and Toxicity Assessment in Clinical Trials; Impact of Treatment with Taxanes on Peripheral Nerve Function in Older Cancer Patients with Diabetes; and Development of New Methods to Avoid Comorbid Conditions in Elderly Patients with Cancer. Each project will be led by two investigators, one with cancer research expertise and the other with aging research expertise.

"The integration of cancer and aging research has become a critical challenge and an important opportunity," said Berger.

The incidence of cancer is 10 times greater in the population over 65 compared to those under 65. Sixty percent of all newly diagnosed malignancies and 70 percent of cancer deaths occur in persons 65 and older. With the aging of the "baby boomers," the number of persons 65 years of age and older is expected to double from 34 million persons to 70 million over the next three decades. The tremendous expansion of this segment of the US population will have a profound impact on the number and care of cancer patients and underscores the importance of this research to improve cancer prevention, detection, and treatment in the elderly.

"This grant from the NCI and NIA recognizes the outstanding quality of research conducted at the Comprehensive Cancer Center, the University Center on Memory and Aging, and other parts of the university and the unique opportunities to enhance their productivity by collaboration and integration of their

activities," said James K.V. Willson, M.D., director of the Case Comprehensive Cancer Center/Ireland Cancer Center at University Hospitals of Cleveland.

Berger is a professor of medicine, biochemistry, and oncology. He is the Hanna-Payne Professor of Experimental Medicine and director of the Center for Science, Health and Society at Case. Berger was formerly chief of the hematology/oncology division, director of the Case/Ireland Cancer Center and then dean and vice-president for medical affairs at the School of Medicine.

Kowal is a professor of medicine and the Amasa B. Ford , M.D., Professor of Geriatric Medicine. He is associate dean for geriatric medicine and the director of the Office of Geriatric Medicine at the Case School of Medicine. He was formerly chief of the division of geriatric medicine at UHC; and, director of the Western Reserve Geriatric Education Center, the Claude Pepper Older Americans Independence Center at Case, and the Geriatric Research and Education Center at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center.

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