

A Different Kind of Cancer Center, a Unique Collaborative Team

The sheer complexity of human biology, both normal and disease-related, continues to amaze and often baffle us as we struggle to unravel it so that we can reduce the burden of suffering and death that results from cancer. Yet understanding cancer biology is only half the battle: We must actively and rapidly translate that knowledge into clinically meaningful applications. Reaching that goal requires a strategic interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary effort to bridge critical basic science with clinical care.

The National Cancer Institute's own clinical cancer program, under the direction of the Center for Cancer Research (CCR), sits squarely at this intersection of exploding basic cancer biology knowledge and new cancer treatments. Although we may not have the same name recognition as other national cancer centers, which are primarily large volume, full-service cancer treatment hospitals and clinics, we are in fact the largest cancer-focused clinical research center in the world. But we are not a traditional cancer care center that happens to do research: Our sole mission is to perform patient-intensive clinical research aimed at translating the explosion of new scientific insights into new approaches to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer.

One of our greatest strengths is our unmatched broad integration of basic and clinical scientists. This combination is particularly powerful at NCI, where basic laboratories adjoin clinical wards. Thanks to this tight collaboration of researchers across disciplines and settings, we are uniquely able to knit together insights from preclinical disease models with science-based approaches to human clinical

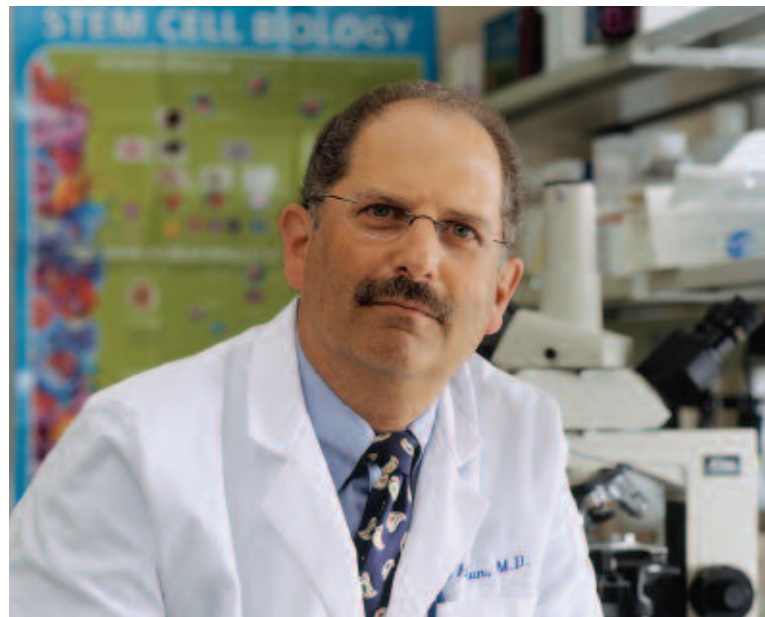
treatment. This ability is especially true in understudied cancers, although our findings often have relevance to many cancers and even other diseases. Our collaborative model allows us to identify new cancer therapies, both single agents and combinations, and bring them rapidly through early development and clinical testing and, if successful, partner with extramural collaborators to ensure that they are quickly brought to widespread trials and hopefully into clinical practice. Our structure also uniquely enables us to find novel ways to detect cancer early and even prevent it, largely through building powerful new imaging technologies that allow us to "see" cancer even in its initial stages.

But perhaps the most important collaborative partners of all, the ones who truly make the NCI cancer clinical research center unique from all others, are the patients who come to us. They come here seeking to actively participate in research with our basic and clinical scientists to drive understanding of their cancer and, ultimately, to find an effective treatment—if not for them, then for others. It is hard to describe the selflessness—the nobility—of those

who participate in the NCI clinical trials that are performed at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Research Center here in Bethesda, Md. We are proud to work with them every day, and their hope and focus underlie ours. If—when—we succeed in our mission, it is clear that the lion's share of the credit must go to them.

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Center for Cancer Research



(Photo: R. Baer)