



iuscc research news

January 2009

News Briefs

Dr. Williams receives state's highest honor, Sagamore of the Wabash

Stephen Williams, MD, the founding director of the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center, has been honored with a Sagamore of the Wabash, the highest honor an Indiana governor can bestow.

Dr. Williams, who is stepping down later this year from the role he has held since the cancer center was formed in 1992, was formally recognized Jan. 12 for his distinguished service to the state. Mitch Roob, Indiana secretary of commerce and CEO of the Indiana Economic Development Corp., presented the award to Dr. Williams during a reception attended by family, friends and colleagues.

"Dr. Williams has truly made an impact that goes beyond the borders of our state," D. Craig Brater, MD, dean of the IU School of Medicine, said. "Thanks to his leadership, Dr. Williams has built a cancer center that has evolved into one recognized by our country's premiere cancer agency, the National Cancer Institute.

"Hoosiers from all of Indiana's 92 counties have sought treatment there as have others from all 50 states and many countries. They seek treatment at the IU Simon Cancer Center because its researchers have developed the standard of care for many cancers and because its physicians -- like Dr. Williams himself -- are dedicated and compassionate individuals. We are indebted to Dr. Williams because he has been a driving force in changing cancer care in Indiana."

The IU Simon Cancer Center was first recognized in 1999 with an NCI designation, which was renewed in 2004 and 2008. The center remains Indiana's only NCI-designated center that provides patient care and one of only 64 in the nation.

Dr. Williams, the H.H. Gregg Professor of Oncology at the IU School of Medicine, is a clinical researcher with national recognition for his expertise in the use of cisplatin in the treatment of ovarian cancer. He is recognized in *America's Top Doctors for Cancer*, and during his tenure, the cancer center has consistently ranked among the top clinical programs in the country, according to *U.S. News & World Report*.

A native Hoosier, Dr. Williams graduated from the IU School of Medicine in 1971 and completed his residency and oncology fellowship at IU. He was the first oncologist appointed at the Roudebush Veterans Administration Medical Center in Indianapolis in 1978 and only the second medical oncologist to serve on the Indiana University School of Medicine faculty. He was named associate dean for cancer research at the IU School of Medicine in 2007.



IUSM Dean Brater presents a signed Indianapolis Colts football to Colts fan Dr. Williams during a Jan. 12 reception in which Williams received a Sagamore of the Wabash. With Williams is his wife, Kay, and daughter, Caroline.



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Dr. Sledge elected ASCO president

George W. Sledge Jr., MD, a nationally recognized pioneer in the development of novel therapies for breast cancer, has

been elected to become president of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) for a one-year term beginning in June 2010. He will take office as president-elect during ASCO's 45th annual meeting in Orlando in June.



Sledge

"Being elected to serve as ASCO president is an honor and a privilege. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the board of directors to support all types of cancer research and address the challenges of the modern-day practice of oncology," Dr. Sledge said. "ASCO institutes real change by uniting all members of the oncology community with the common goal of improving cancer care and prevention and ensuring that all patients with cancer receive the highest quality care."

Dr. Sledge joined the Indiana University School of Medicine faculty in 1983, after completing his residency at St. Louis University and his fellowship at the University of Texas, San Antonio. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin and his medical degree from Tulane University. His research interests include molecular and tumor biology, growth factors, and anti-angiogenic therapy related to breast cancer.

"Every new member that is elected to ASCO's board of directors brings a unique perspective that will shape the society's future goals and practices," Allen S. Lichter, MD, chief executive officer of ASCO, said. "I am particularly looking forward to working with Dr. Sledge and watching how his 25 years as an ASCO member will define the legacy that he leaves on the society's efforts to improve cancer care."

Since joining ASCO in 1984, Dr. Sledge has demonstrated a comprehensive record of service to the society. He served on the ASCO board of directors from 2005 to 2008 and served as a member of the nominating committee from 2000 to 2003, serving as chair from 2002 to 2003.

Additionally, Dr. Sledge has served on the cancer education

committee in various capacities, the scientific program committee, and the personnel committee. He has also served on the Best of ASCO Abstract Selection Committee, the Post-Mastectomy Radiotherapy Expert Panel, the Aspen Conference Planning Committee, and the Government Relations Council.

Dr. Sledge is also an active member of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) and serves as chair of the breast cancer committee of the Hoosier Oncology Group. He currently serves as chair of the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group and serves in various capacities for The Breast Cancer Intergroup. He was also secretary (1997-1998) and a board of trustees member (1995-1998) of the Indiana Medical Oncology Society.

Dr. Sledge has received many awards and honors, most recently The Jill Rose Award - Breast Cancer Research Foundation (2007) and the 2006 Komen Foundation Brinker Award for Scientific Distinction. He is also listed in "America's Top Doctors" (2001-2007).



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Cancer Research Day is May 6

Cancer researchers in Indiana can soon submit research abstracts for the 2009 Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center Cancer Research Day.

Students, fellows, and faculty conducting cancer research at IUPUI, Indiana University-Bloomington, Purdue University, and the Walther Cancer Research Center at the University of Notre Dame are eligible to present their current cancer research efforts at this year's event.

Set for May 6, Cancer Research Day, led by James Klaunig, PhD, encourages collaboration among the cancer research institutions in the state.

Watch for more details in a future *IUSCC Research News* or [visit this page](#) for updates.

Kornelia Polyak, MD, PhD, of Dana Farber Cancer Institute will deliver the keynote address, "Breast Tumor Evolution," at 4 p.m. in the auditorium in R4.



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Core Spotlight

Biological Microscopy

For the past six months, IU Simon Cancer Center member Nadia Carlesso, MD, PhD, has been honing her skills at conducting microscopy with living animals, intravital microscopy.

Carlesso has been learning from Kenneth Dunn, PhD, scientific director of the [Indiana Center for Biological Microscopy](#), and colleagues.

According to Dunn, "Intravital microscopy is difficult because it requires a lot of technical skills in animal surgery and microscopy that are very daunting. You can make a surgical incision in an animal and place the animal on a microscope stage and look at an individual cell, an individual molecule within individual cells inside a living animal. That's a very powerful technique. It's also something you don't find at very many imaging facilities in the country."

Working with the staff of the imaging center, Dunn and Carlesso have been training a technician, who can help provide expertise to IU Simon Cancer Center members who would like to include intravital microscopy in their research.

In addition to intravital microscopy, the Indiana Center for Biological Microscopy is one of a handful in the world equipped for low-light level microscopy, confocal microscopy, UV confocal microscopy, 2-photon microscopy, digital deconvolution microscopy, and the latest systems for digital image analysis and visualization.

Located in Research II, the biological microscopy center is one of the nation's most advanced with its powerful microscopes, computers and software, and precise lasers. The microscopy systems, in conjunction with software designed at the center, use fluorescent molecules to produce detailed quantitative three dimensional images of cells and to analyze activities in living cells within the body.

For more information, contact [Dr. Dunn](#) at 278-0436.



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Researchers' clinical trial may lead to safer treatments for blood cancers

Researchers with the IU Simon Cancer Center are looking into ways to improve engraftment after human umbilical

cord blood (UCB) transplants for patients with blood cancers.

Led by Sherif Farag, MBBS, PhD, director of the Hematological Malignancies Program and the Bone Marrow and Stem Cell Transplantation Program at the cancer center, the researchers are recruiting adult patients who have had an umbilical cord blood (UCB) transplant into a phase II clinical trial.



Farag

UCB transplantation is an alternative source of stem cells for patients who lack an available blood stem cell donor. However, in adults, engraftment -- the process in which the donated cells from a transplant start to grow and make new blood cells -- happens slowly, which limits its effectiveness.

Because of that, Dr. Farag and colleagues will block a protein, CD26, to see if it speeds up engraftment.

Results from this trial may offer patients with blood cancers safer and more readily available treatments.

This clinical trial builds on previous ground-breaking studies done by Hal Broxmeyer, PhD. Broxmeyer found in the laboratory that inhibiting the protein CD26 enhances engraftment of low numbers of stem cells in animals.


The study is funded by the V Foundation for Cancer Research and the Signature Center Initiative at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis.

IUSCC Members in the News


- **Rafat Abonour, MD**, and colleagues made a presentation at the American Society of Hematology's (ASH) 50th Annual Meeting and Exposition held Dec. 6 -9 in San Francisco. They presented findings on "A Phase II Study of Oral Panobinostat (LBH589) in Adult Patients with Advanced Refractory Multiple Myeloma."

Panobinostat is a highly potent pan-deacetylase inhibitor with great in vitro activity against multiple myeloma (MM) cell lines resistant to conventional therapies. It modulates two targets implicated in MM by controlling cell proliferation and survival through HSP90 and inducing apoptosis through the aggresome pathway. Although single agent activity was limited, the excellent toxicity profile warrants further investigation of this agent in combination with other agents shown to be synergistic. It was one of eight clinical trials from the Multiple Myeloma Research Consortium (MMRC) and the MMRC Multiple Myeloma Genomics Initiative. In June, the MMRC announced the addition of IU into the consortium based on its experience in conducting phase I and phase II clinical trials, its ability to enroll patients into these clinical trials, and the speed at which it is able to initiate clinical trials, according to the MMRC. [See previous story.](#)

- **Peter Johnstone**, MD, MA, has been appointed president-elect of the American Radium Society from May 2009 to May 2010 and president from May 2010 to May 2011.



Johnstone
- **Nasser Hanna**, MD, participated in a town hall forum sponsored by the Indiana Campaign for Smokefree Air (ICSA) at the Indiana State House on Jan. 15. Hanna discussed the dangers of smoking and secondhand smoke. ICSA is a statewide coalition of organizations that seeks a statewide smoke-free air legislation that protects all workers from the dangers of secondhand smoke.
- **Bryan Schneider**, MD, and colleagues -- including George Sledge, MD -- published "Triple-Negative Breast Cancer: Risk Factors to Potential Targets" in the Dec. 15 issue of [Clinical Cancer Research](#). Schneider and colleagues wrote, "Although the risk factors for estrogen receptor-positive disease are well defined, those for triple-negative disease are less well defined. A more comprehensive understanding of gene expression and genetic variability is central to understand both the etiology and pathogenesis of this disease. At the current time, we believe that trials should focus on recruitment of triple-negative breast cancer but of a sufficiently large population to have statistical power to retrospectively analyze for a molecularly defined subgroup as well."



Schneider

Wanted: Mentors for Summer Research Program

You are invited to serve as a faculty mentor for the 2009 [IU Simon Cancer Center Summer Research Program](#), June 1 - July 31. By placing students with faculty mentors, students gain insight into a wide-range of basic science, translational, and clinical research activities. Mentors facilitate and guide the students toward completing a research project, encourage students to explore the field of biomedical science, and provide students access to professional networks. Mentors receive \$500 toward the purchase of lab supplies for the student(s) and project(s).

Questions? Contact [Rivienne Shedd-Steele](#) at 278-0073.

Summer Research Program applications available

Do you know of high school and college students interested in exploring a career in cancer research? If so, encourage them to apply for this summer's IU Simon Cancer Center Summer Research Program. The cancer center's annual program places students with a mentor physician or researcher for nine weeks (June 1-July 31). The students will work with faculty who are doing research in the most progressive areas of cancer research. Participants are full-time high school or undergraduate students from populations underrepresented in biomedical or behavioral sciences. Students interested in the Summer Research Program can find an application [here](#) or they can send an e-mail to crstaff@iupui.edu to request one. Questions? Contact the IUPUI Center for Research & Learning at (317) 274-8880.



Contractors are nearly finished in RIII, according to Charles Rogers, assistant director for facility design & construction for the IU School of Medicine. The first furniture delivery is set for Feb. 2, while people will begin moving into the building in early April. When RIII opens, half of the labs will be used by IU Simon Cancer Center researchers.