Memorial Sloan Kettering Investigator Named Dream Team Leader by Stand Up To Cancer

New York, NY, Wednesday, May 27, 2009

Charles Sawyers , MD, Director of the Human Oncology and Pathogenesis Program at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator, has been named a “Dream Team” leader by Stand Up To Cancer and will co-lead a collaborative team that will receive $15 million to study targeted therapies to treat women’s cancers.

Dr. Sawyers’ team is among one of five collaborative research teams in the United States that will receive a total of $73.6 million from Stand Up To Cancer (SU2C) to support promising cancer research.

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This infusion of funding comes one year after SU2C announced its commitment to raise money to support ground-breaking research aimed at getting new cancer treatments to patients in an accelerated timeframe. The majority of these funds were raised in connection with a one-hour, star-studded telecast that aired September 5, 2008, simultaneously on ABC, CBS, and NBC.

Each installment of the three-year grants will support five multidisciplinary “Dream Teams,” which are composed of more than 200 researchers from 20 institutions across the country.

The goal of the Dream Team being co-led by Dr. Sawyers is to discover approaches that predict which patients will respond to drugs that inhibit the P13K cellular pathway — a cancer pathway regulated by a common set of genes that frequently carry the same mutations in women with breast , ovarian , and endometrial cancers. Since PI3K pathway mutations are frequent in women with these cancers, a common set of techniques may be successful at predicting those patients who will benefit from PI3K pathway inhibitors for all three of these diseases.

“We are taking the unprecedented approach of not only collaborating across multiple institutions, but also across multiple diseases,” said Dr. Sawyers, whose team co-leaders are Lewis C. Cantley, PhD, of Beth Israel Deaconess Cancer Center in Boston and Gordon B. Mills, MD, PhD, of MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. “By encouraging the exchange of materials and ideas between scientists and clinicians researching breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancers, we hope to accelerate the cure of all three.”

The members of this Dream Team have already shared their unpublished data on the mutational status of components of the PI3K pathway in breast, ovarian, and endometrial tumors, and are assembling an inter-institutional database that correlates the mutational status of this pathway with pathology, PET imaging responses, and patient outcome in multiple ongoing clinical trials.

This unprecedented level of collaboration across top cancer centers in the United States and worldwide was encouraged by the formation of this Dream Team, which includes researchers from Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Columbia University’s Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center in New York City, Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center in Nashville, Vall d’Hebron Institute on Oncology, in Barcelona, Spain, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Beth Israel Deaconess Cancer Center, and MSKCC.

“The projects that Stand Up To Cancer is funding address the most critical areas of cancer research today and may collectively impact the diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of cancers,” said Dr. Sawyers. “The hope is that our work will ultimately provide techniques for personalized cancer treatment that can be incorporated into standard practice.”

Stand Up To Cancer is a program of the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit that serves as a collective charitable organization for the television and film businesses.