

MSKCC Group Studies Needs of Immigrant and Underserved Communities in New York City

The newest group to join the SOAR program is the **Immigrant Health and Cancer Disparities Service (IHCD)**, a unit established in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in 2011. Led by internist and researcher **Francesca Gany**, the IHCD and its member investigators work to bridge immigrants, minority community members, and the medically underserved with the healthcare system, and to eliminate health disparities. Their work has strengthened the link between research and service delivery for immigrant and medically underserved populations in New York City. Prior to joining MSKCC, Dr. Gany was the founder and director of the Center for Immigrant Health at the New York University School of Medicine

Although the IHCD's members are interested in a range of health issues affecting immigrant and underserved communities, the group's move to MSKCC has given them a special interest in cancer. According to Dr. Gany, the welfare of patients from at-risk communities is often compromised by higher rates of comorbid illness and barriers to care. She and her colleagues emphasize the importance of community-specific research for understanding the unique needs and cultural concerns of a population and designing successful interventions to address them.

In addition to Dr. Gany, SOAR investigators in the IHCD include **Abraham Aragon**, an internist studying HPV vaccination and screening in Latino communities; **Lisa Diamond**, a hospitalist whose research addresses language access and its effect on care for patients with limited English proficiency; and **Jennifer Leng**, an internist studying support and survivorship interventions for Chinese cancer patients.

IHCD investigators have successfully translated their research findings into policies and programs for immigrant and underserved communities in New York City and across the country. For example, they designed and implemented stress reduction interventions to decrease cancer and cardiovascular risk among taxi drivers with elevated blood pressure and glucose levels. Prompted by IHCD research prioritizing the health needs of Mexican immigrants, 50 Mexican consulates in the US are now studying strategies to provide HPV immunizations and screening. IHCD helped establish food pantries in cancer facilities around the city for patients who are food insecure, and the group is developing a model for medically enhanced housing shelters.



Clockwise from top left: Dr. Gany performs a blood-glucose test at the *Step On It!* health fair for taxi drivers at JFK Airport in Queens. Dr. Gany offers a drive-by reading of a tuberculosis skin test for a taxi driver. IHCD staff conduct oral cancer screenings at a Diwali Mela health fair in Jackson Heights, Queens.

Supreme Court Will Decide Whether Human Genes Can Be Patented

The Supreme Court announced in November that it will hear a case challenging patents on human genes. The case was originally brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the Association for Molecular Pathology and others against Myriad Genetics Inc. and the University of Utah, which hold patents on the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* genes associated with increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer.

In March 2010 a U.S. district court in

Mark your calendar

December 11 SOAR Seminar
4:00 PM
RRL-104
"Financial Toxicity: An Emerging Concept and Consequence of Cancer Care"
Scott Ramsey, MD, PhD
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

New York agreed with the plaintiffs that human genes could not be patented. But the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit subsequently upheld Myriad's patents on the grounds that the DNA isolated for a genetic test has a "markedly different chemical structure" from DNA found in the body.

The court's decision in the Myriad case could have far-reaching effects on cancer research and treatment. In a brief filed in support of the ACLU's position, the American Medical Association, American Society of Human Genetics, American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and other professional societies argued that upholding Myriad's patent claims would inhibit future innovation because, "a patent holder can prevent scientists and clinicians from undertaking any genetic research related to a disease arising from a mutation in that gene." In a separate brief, the National Women's Health Network and other

monopoly on *BRCA1/2* testing could be especially harmful to women of racial and ethnic minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged women.

SOAR investigator **Mark Robson** (Clinical Genetics) specializes in the treatment of high-risk breast cancer, including cancers in women with genetic mutations. Commenting on the implications of the Myriad case, Robson said, "I have not felt that Myriad's patent has restricted the access of our patients to testing, given that insurance companies are willing to cover it in most circumstances where testing is appropriate, and we have very clearly been able to get high quality testing with turn-around times that have not been consistently reached in, for instance, Europe. On the other hand, I can see an argument that certain kinds of research could proceed more smoothly if not for the cost barriers imposed by patenting/licensing."

Ann Zauber Promoted to Member



SOAR investigator **Ann Zauber** (Epidemiology) was recently promoted to the rank of Member at Memorial Hospital. Ann is the seventh investigator and the second woman to achieve this rank in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

Ann joined the department after completing a Ph.D. in Biostatistics from Johns Hopkins University and a postdoctoral fellowship in Epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh. Since 1987 she has worked as either a biostatistician or epidemiologist and has held a joint appointment in the Gastroenterology & Nutrition

Service since 1988. She has published more than 130 papers in 52 different journals, including the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Ann's research addresses colorectal cancer prevention, screening, treatment and surveillance. She currently serves as Coordinating Center PI for the colorectal working group of the Cancer Intervention and Surveillance Modeling Network (CISNET), a multi-institutional NCI-sponsored consortium. Microsimulation models developed by Ann and her colleagues have directly informed screening recommendations from the US Preventive Services Task Force and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Ann is PI of the National Colonoscopy Study, a multi-institutional randomized trial comparing colonoscopy with fecal occult blood test (FOBT) for colorectal cancer screening, and she is a co-Investigator in the National Polyp Study, a multi-institutional randomized trial evaluating strategies for the surveillance of colorectal adenomas. In February the *New York Times* featured a front-page article on the National Polyp Study, reporting the trial's finding that colonoscopy is associated with a reduced risk of death from colorectal cancer.

Asked about the implications of her work and challenges for the future, Ann commented on the importance of effective communication about cancer screening, in explaining, for instance why cancers may be detected between screenings. "Screening is not well understood in the population," she said. "An interval cancer is not necessarily medical malpractice, but can be a product of a test that is not perfect." She also noted the value of microsimulation modeling to project long-term benefits and harms of cancer screening strategies, as well as costs and resource needs.

"I have witnessed the meteoric rise of Ann's star and have had the distinct pleasure and privilege of working closely with her for more than 30 years," said **Sidney Winawer** (Medicine), PI of the National Polyp study. Dr. Winawer added, "My relationship with Ann has been a model of a true intellectual partnership of a biostatistician and clinician, sustained to a large extent by Ann's steady supply of her famous pound cakes which at a late hour and with a cup of tea has generated most of our great scientific conversations and ideas. I have told Ann over the years that she has become a far better clinician than I a biostatistician."

Recent SOAR Seminars

Robert Smith, Director of Cancer Screening at the National Office of the American Cancer Society (ACS) presented ACS's screening guideline development process on October 9th. Smith said that guidelines will be reviewed and rewritten every five years.



Elizabeth Jacobs, Associate Vice Chair for Health Services Research in the Department of Medicine at the University of Wisconsin–Madison presented "Measuring the Cost and Benefits of Overcoming Language Barriers in Health Care" on November 13th.



New Funding Opportunity in Outcomes Research

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) announced a new funding opportunity to support research that addresses methodological gaps in patient-centered outcomes research. PCORI will award \$12 million for up to 14 contracts that collaborate with patients and stakeholders to address knowledge gaps and advance the field of comparative clinical effectiveness research. This mechanism expands PCORI's portfolio, adding to the four previously released funding announcements. PCORI has three funding cycles per year, with a letter of intent required two months before each application deadline. Authorized by Congress in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, PCORI has already awarded \$30 million for 50 pilot projects to investigators in 24 states and the District of Columbia. More information can be found at: www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities/

PCORI Funding Announcements

Application Deadlines:
Dec 17, Apr 15, Aug 15

- > Assessment of prevention, diagnosis, and treatment options
- > Improving healthcare systems
- > Communication and dissemination research
- > Addressing disparities

Application Deadlines:
Mar 15, Aug 15, Dec 17

- > Accelerating patient-centered outcomes research and methodological research

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