

Seeking New Ways to Fight Skin Cancer

Center of Excellence on Cancers of the Skin

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Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S., with more than one million new cases diagnosed annually. In 2008, over 8,400 deaths will be attributed to melanoma. While most skin cancers are curable with early detection, the incidence of potentially fatal melanoma is increasing. As the population ages, the disease is becoming a growing public health concern. Bringing together unique assets of the Medical Center such as the largest Dermatology department in the country, our NCI-designated Cancer Institute and the Tumor Vaccine Program, this Center of Excellence will attract talented clinicians, new scientists, and the funding needed to accelerate the discovery of innovative ways to prevent, detect, and treat skin cancer.

Established in 1882 as the New York Skin and Cancer Hospital, dermatology at NYU has continuously been in the vanguard of skin cancer research and patient care—from opening one of the earliest Mohs surgery units for skin cancer to developing the nation’s first computerized clinical data bank in dermatology, to devising the “ABCDE” guidelines for quick identification of melanomas. In the 1990s the NYU Cancer Institute was one of the first NIH-designated skin disease research centers, and is home to a state-of-the-art facility for producing cancer vaccines and other immuno-therapies. More than 9,000 patients with cancer of the skin receive care at NYU Langone each year.

Exemplified by the creation of the Interdisciplinary Melanoma Cooperative Group (IMCG) in 2002, NYU Langone is a pioneer in integrating translational research with patient care. For example, our clinicians recently noted an increased percentage of patients with nodular melanoma. They then screened for approved drugs that specifically kill these cancer cells. Upon completion of animal testing, the NYU Cancer Institute will complete the path of translation by offering these drugs to patients in a clinical trial.

The new Center of Excellence on Cancers of the Skin will expand on its successful translational model. Some 40 researchers from over a dozen disciplines are investigating the genetic risk factors for early onset melanoma, the molecular biology of melanoma, prognostic blood markers, prevention and early detection, vaccine strategies, and the development of small molecule therapeutics.

The Center of Excellence designation recognizes NYU Langone’s leadership in cancers of the skin. Here, researchers have access to one of the nation’s largest patient and tissue databases, and collaborate with leading clinicians who translate their ideas to the clinic. Patients receive attention from teams of collaborating physicians with a specific interest in skin cancers, and are the beneficiaries of unique therapeutic protocols developed at NYU Langone. In one recent study, researchers at the NYU Cancer Institute and the Ronald O. Perelman Department of Dermatology identified mebendazole, a drug used to treat parasitic infections, as a novel investigational agent for treating chemotherapy-resistant malignant melanoma.