Southwest
Oncology Group
A National Clinical Research Group

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Innovative program prepares doctors to conduct cancer research

SEATTLE, Wash. — Six talented cancer researchers chosen through a competitive process just completed the Southwest Oncology Group Young Investigators Training Course. The course puts the physicians on the fast track to develop and conduct cancer clinical trials through the Southwest Oncology Group, one of the largest cancer clinical trials cooperative groups in the nation.

The physicians were selected based on their personal application, a concept they hope to develop into a Southwest Oncology Group clinical trial and the recommendation of their medical institution. During the course, which ended Sept. 13, the doctors received intensive training in statistical principles, data collection, analysis, critical decision-making and procedures. These skills will help them propose relevant clinical trials through the Southwest Oncology Group that are more likely to be funded by the National Cancer Institute. Following are the researchers and their proposed protocols:

▪ **Katherine D. Crew, M.D., M.S.**, is assistant professor of medicine and epidemiology at Columbia University, New York, N.Y. Dr. Crew is proposing a Phase II randomized trial to study whether vitamin D may have an effect on breast density. If it does, vitamin D may prove to be useful in preventing breast cancer. "Only tamoxifen and raloxifene have been approved to reduce the risk of breast cancer in women at high risk of developing the disease," Dr. Crew said. "We hope information from this Phase II study will help justify further evaluation of vitamin D in future breast cancer prevention trials."

▪ **Nestor F. Esnaola, M.D., M.P.H**., is assistant professor in the Surgical Oncology Section at Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, S.C. Dr. Esnaola is proposing a novel protocol combining induction gemcitabine and full-dose gemcitabine with concurrent limited-field radiation therapy in an effort to "downstage" patients with otherwise unresectable, locally advanced pancreatic cancer. "As a surgical oncologist, I have been disappointed by our results with traditional 5-FU-based chemoradiation regimens in patients with locally advanced pancreatic cancer. I believe the proposed regimen holds significant promise and may well change the way we view and treat these patients," Dr. Esnaola explained.

▪ **Norah Lynn Henry, M.D., Ph.D.**, is a hematology/oncology fellow at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center in Ann Arbor, Mich.

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Dr. Henry's proposed study will evaluate the use of aromatase inhibitors in premenopausal breast cancer patients who develop ovarian failure following chemotherapy for early stage disease. In addition to determining the frequency of recurrence of ovarian function in this patient population, an appropriate monitoring strategy will be identified. Additional studies will evaluate genetic, epidemiological and biochemical factors to determine if they are predictive for the maintenance of ovarian failure.

▪ **John Sarantopoulos, M.D**., is clinical research fellow in the Advanced Drug Development Program at the Cancer Therapy & Research Center's Institute for Drug Development in San Antonio, Texas. Dr. Sarantopoulos has proposed a Phase I study to evaluate the safety, tolerability and most effective dose of dasatinib in patients with a variety of advanced cancers and different degrees of liver dysfunction.

▪ **Andrew J. Stephenson, M.D.**, is associate attending physician and assistant professor at the Glickman Urological Institute at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Stephenson is proposing a Phase III trial comparing pelvic radiotherapy to pelvic radiation therapy plus docetaxel for selected high-risk patients with prostate cancer who have had a radical prostatectomy. "Adjuvant radiation therapy after radical prostatectomy has been demonstrated to improve progression-free and metastasis-free survival in three recent randomized trials in the United States and Europe. There is also growing enthusiasm for the use to taxane-based chemotherapy in hormone-naïve, non-metastatic prostate cancer based on the improved survival associated with docetaxel in the androgen-independent, metastatic disease setting. We aim to test whether integrating radiation therapy and docetaxel-based chemotherapy in the adjuvant setting after radical prostatectomy will lead to improvements in metastasis-free and overall survival in high-risk patients," explained Dr. Stephenson.

▪ **Glen J. Weiss, M.D.**, is chief fellow of hematology/medical oncology at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Aurora, Colo. Dr. Weiss has proposed a study to examine the combination of two oral chemotherapy drugs for patients with a subtype of advanced non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) that includes bronchioloalveolar carcinoma (BAC) and adenocarcinoma with BAC features. Dr. Weiss plans to evaluate whether a combination of erlotinib and sorafenib will provide an effective treatment option.

SWOG Chairman Laurence H. Baker, D.O., explained, "It is important to encourage and mentor young physicians interested in clinical research. Helping these bright, young researchers learn how to properly conduct clinical trials will help SWOG and cancer researchers everywhere come closer to preventing and treating cancer, and improving the quality of life for cancer survivors."

This is the 10th Young Investigator Training Course conducted by SWOG. The 35 previous graduates of the course have been coordinators or co-coordinators of 27 active or completed studies. Several more of their studies are still in development.

For more information about the investigators, the Young Investigators Training Course or the Southwest Oncology Group, please contact Rosanne Fohn at 210-450-8808.

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