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## **SWOG Pushes to Expand Access to Cancer Trials for U.S. Veterans**

PORTLAND, OR – As part of a major effort to expand access to cancer clinical trials for the nation’s military veterans, SWOG, the international cancer clinical trials network, and its charitable arm, The Hope Foundation, are providing \$125,000 to five U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers across the country.

Under the new VA Integration Support Program, each VA medical center will receive \$25,000 in seed funding to help them enroll veterans in trials run by SWOG and other members of the National Cancer Institute’s National Clinical Trials Network (NCTN).

Winners of the VA Integration Support Program awards are:

- Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, Little Rock, Ark.
- Cincinnati VA Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Durham VA Medical Center, Durham, N.C.
- VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System, Denver, Colo.
- VA New York Harbor Healthcare System, Manhattan Campus, New York, N.Y.

Funded by The Hope Foundation and announced to sites last week, the awards are part of a unique SWOG initiative to serve veterans. According to 2010 VA statistics, the most recent available, over 55,000 veterans were receiving cancer care at VA medical centers, with prostate, lung, and colorectal cancers being the most prevalent.

SWOG is the first NCTN member to actively support VA centers and recruit veterans directly to their trials. SWOG has about 75 active trials testing treatment and prevention methods for a variety of cancers, from lung to leukemia, breast to bladder.

“With cancer treatment, the standard of care includes access to clinical trials – and our military veterans deserve nothing less than the standard of care,” said Dr. Charles Blanke, the SWOG group chair and an oncologist and professor with the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University. “Prostate, lung, and other cancers are common in veterans and we want to give them access to the latest treatments.”

Under Dr. Blanke’s leadership, SWOG created a new membership support position, which was filled in September. A key function of this role is to serve as a VA navigator, answering questions, assisting with paperwork, and advising on the logistical, regulatory and financial issues VA sites face when participating in NCTN studies.

SWOG has also formed a partnership with the VA New England Clinical Trial Network (CTN) and the Massachusetts Veterans Epidemiology Research and Information Center, or MAVERIC, a Boston-based VA organization that advances research and clinical care for veterans and is supported by the VA Office of Research and Development.

In September, MAVERIC joined SWOG as a member. This means that doctors in MAVERIC's five New England VA medical centers can enroll patients in trials run by SWOG or any of three other adult NCTN groups. The groups – SWOG, Alliance for Clinical Trials in Oncology, ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group and NRG Oncology – are a major part of the nation's cancer research infrastructure, running hundreds of treatment and prevention trials that enroll tens of thousands of patients each year.

VA centers face a host of hurdles to cancer trial enrollment. One is money. Per-patient funding from SWOG and other NCTN groups often goes to the medical center's university affiliate, reducing the incentive for centers to enroll patients in NCTN trials.

Most hurdles, however, involve time – or a lack of it. To take part in trials, medical center staffers need to enroll and monitor patients, submit a raft of data to trial managers, and organize reviews from either a local or national Institutional Review Board, which work to ensure ethical conduct and patient safety. Every VA site that receives a SWOG award will use some or all of the money to support new or existing trial support staff.

“For VA centers, these seed funds will go a long way,” said Stephen Bartlett, the research pharmacy manager for the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System, an associate professor in the University of Colorado's School of Medicine, and a major force behind SWOG's efforts on behalf of veterans. “The awards will help get sites up and running, and allow veterans access to cutting-edge cancer clinical trials.”

For SWOG membership or VA navigator assistance, call the SWOG Operations Center at (210) 614-8808. For the VA Integration Support Program, contact Morgan Cox at The Hope Foundation at (734) 998-6887 or [morgan@thehopefoundation.org](mailto:morgan@thehopefoundation.org).

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*SWOG is a worldwide network of nearly 6,000 researchers that design and conduct cancer clinical trials at more than 950 sites. The group's goal is to change medical practice so it improves the lives of people with cancer. SWOG trials are also aimed at better preventing and detecting cancer, the second leading cause of death in the U.S. Founded in 1956 and based at the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University, SWOG receives major funding from the National Cancer Institute, with philanthropic support from The Hope Foundation.*

*The Hope Foundation is a public charity that supports SWOG's work by providing funds for research grants and fellowships, physician education, clinical trial support, and patient advocacy.*