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Volume 8 - Issue 1

January 25, 2008

# **Message from the Executive Director**



As we begin the new year, HCI will hold its second strategic planning retreat on January 26 to follow up on the work we completed at our two-day strategic planning launch in November 2007 at Sundance. Our November meeting was inspirational with high-level participation, honest dialogue, tremendous expertise and creativity, a collegial and collaborative spirit, and a thoughtful focus on our institutional success. At the retreat, the group developed the following strategic vision to guide our course in the coming years:

Mary Beckerle, PhD Executive Director

We are an NCI-designated comprehensive cancer center reducing the impact of cancer on individuals and their families by collaborating broadly to provide excellence in innovative research, patient care, and

education and outreach.

What an inspiring statement, articulating our commonly held aspiration for HCI and supported by a deep and broad commitment within our community! This vision will guide our work. To achieve the vision, the group identified a number of specific goals for focus in the next five years, which include the following:

- Renew our Cancer Center Support Grant (NCI designation) and establish a plan to achieve comprehensive status
- Improve understanding of the genetic, molecular, and physiologic aspects of patients and their tumors in order to personalize prevention, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment strategies
- Create a culture of collaboration to advance research, clinical care, education, and outreach
- Optimize delivery of our clinical care for cancer patients, ensuring worldclass multidisciplinary cancer care
- Maintain and enhance our research excellence in basic and population sciences
- Optimize capacity for translating research findings to clinical applications
- Increase capacity for innovative training of cancer researchers and physicians

We are currently in the process of developing strategic initiatives that will describe how each objective will be achieved and defining key measures, objective and quantifiable metrics, by which we will assess our progress. Developing the plan is a critical step, but it is just the beginning. The most important phase comes with implementation of the plan. This will involve the participation of everyone in our community contributing strategically to our mission on a daily basis. Our collective focus, energy, and commitment to work toward our common vision are essential to our future success.

Watch for updates on our strategic planning process that will be published in the Beacon.

Best wishes,

#### News You Can Use

- New Oncology Nurse Interns on board
- Survey aims to improve patient education
- Employees win at losing
- Series to make science understandable
- January CLC Newsletter

## **CCSG Program News**

 Cancer Control and Population Sciences

Welcome New Staff

## Welcome New Staff

#### **Bernard Lab**

Carole Davis Lab Technician

# **BMT Inpatient**

Yu-Miao Kao Clinical Nurse

### Communications and Public Affairs

Cathy Brown Editor

## **Cyclotron Operations**

Thanh Nguyen Lab Technician

## **Environmental Services**

Micaela Olivera Custodian

## Food Service

Whitney Burdett Room Service Attendant

Bette Homrighouse Room Service Attendant

Russell Page Cook

## High Risk Cancers Group

Dustin Hawkins Project Administrator

### Mary Beckerle, PhD HCI Executive Director



HCl's strategic planning group launched its work at a two-day Sundance retreat in November 2007.



Open discussions among the group resulted in many thoughtful ideas focused on HCl's future success.

Kathleen Shafer Project Coordinator

Inpatient Fourth Floor

Heidi Berquist Clinical Nurse

Jill Gahlsdorf Clinical Nurse

Bridgette Murillo Clinical Nurse

Inpatient Fifth Floor

Tiffany Cupit Clinical Nurse

Mandy Jacobs Clinical Nurse

Jamie Rasmussen Health Care Assistant

Leachman Lab

Brad Graham Lab Specialist

**Outpatient Clinic B** 

Junko Fowles Bone Marrow Transplant Facilitator

Outpatient Clinic C & E

David Clark Outpatient Clinic Representative

Matthew Entwistle Outpatient Clinic Representative

**Pharmacy** 

D. Thomas Pharmacy Technician

**Population Sciences** 

Karim Khader Graduate Research Assistant

**Radiation Oncology** 

Sarah Geneser Postdoctoral Fellow

Randall Lab

Diane Miller Administrative Assistant

Research Administration

Sydnee Scarborough Administrative Assistant



Participants met in smaller focus groups to identify specific goals for the next five years.

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## In Memoriam: Jeanne Truxal



Jeanne Truxal

Jeanne Truxal, director of communications at HCI, passed away in late December after a long struggle with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Despite this debilitating disease, she continued to work full-time from her home to the time of her death. Jeanne would have celebrated ten years of service with HCI in 2008.

The Communications Department, which produces Beacon, the internal and public websites, and print materials for HCI, will carry on in the spirit of the wise guidance, endless encouragement, and creative challenges Jeanne so generously offered. Jeanne brought out the best in us both professionally and personally. It

was a privilege to work with her, and her motivation and ability to lead inspired us and all who knew her.

Jeanne's creative and committed spirit has inspired not only those under her supervision in HCI's Print and Electronic Communications groups, but all who have had the opportunity to work with her in any capacity.

-Mary Beckerle, HCI Executive Director

Jeanne persevered to the end, and the bar was never lowered to accommodate her illness—nor did she want it to be. Her influence will be long-lasting. I will forever remember her dignity and grace in the face of difficult personal challenges—a lasting example to us all.

-Scott Lloyd, Senior Director of Finance and Administration

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#### Surgical Oncology

Stacy Hansen Health Care Assistant

#### Alana Welm Lab

Henok Eyob Graduate Assistant

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#### Mark your calendar

#### February 1-2

HCI K-Bull 93 Radio-a-Thon Fountain Court, South Towne Center, Sandy

#### February 13

\*Seminar Series Monica Bertagnolli, MD Brigham and Women's Hospital The role of inflammation

The role of inflammation in colorectal tumor formation

### February 20

\*Seminar Series Scott Armstrong, MD, PhD Children's Hospital Boston Genetic programs controlling leukemia stem cell development

#### February 27

- \*Seminar Series Mary Beckerle, PhD Huntsman Cancer Institute The state of Huntsman Cancer Institute
- \*Seminar Series events held in the HCI sixth floor Eccles Auditorium

# **Introducing the Alana Welm Lab**



Members of the Alana Welm Lab include (from left) Mazin al-Salihi, postdoctoral fellow; Maggie Woolf, lab technician; Henok Eyob, graduate student; Robert Staples, lab technician; Christine Lin, lab aide; Christian Pfleuger, rotation student; Alana Welm, HCl investigator; and Dustin Bagley, rotation student.

One of the newest HCI labs, the Alana Welm lab focuses on learning how and why breast cancer spreads and developing new treatments to prevent it.

Alana Welm, PhD, an assistant professor in the Department of Oncological Sciences and HCI investigator, came to HCI in January 2007 after training with 1989 Nobel Prize winner J. Michael Bishop at the University of California, San Francisco. Her lab members include Henok Eyob, graduate student; Robert Staples and Maggie Woolf, lab technicians; and Christine Lin, lab aide. Mazin Al-Salihi, PhD, will begin his postdoctoral fellowship in March. Christian Pflueger and Dustin Bagley are rotation students currently associated with the lab.

The lab's research currently focuses on macrophage stimulating protein (MSP), which plays an important role in the spread, or metastasis, of breast cancer to other organs. MSP is not always a villain in the human body.

"It's important in allowing macrophages [specialized white blood cells that ingest foreign material and infectious microorganisms] to help heal wounds. Many researchers compare tumors to wounds that do not heal," Welm says. This creates an interesting connection to the result that occurs in a tumor when the MSP pathway is more active than normal.

"Our lab's research shows a clear connection between overactive MSP and breast cancer metastasis in mice, following much the same pattern that exists when these cells metastasize in humans," she says.

Currently the lab is testing various inhibitors of the MSP pathway as possible treatments to prevent metastasis. The researchers are also trying to gain a better understanding of the normal biology of MSP.

Another study, in collaboration with an HCI multidisciplinary breast cancer clinical and research group, is designed to test new treatment combinations in various types of breast cancer tissue. Patients donate tissue removed during their surgery to this research. This tissue is implanted in mice, where new tumors of that specific cancer type grow. The mouse model allows testing of drug combinations to

determine the most effective treatment for that cancer. The tests could be completed within the timeframe of the patient's chemotherapy, which may make it possible to adjust treatment not only for future patients but for the woman who donated tissue. The collaborators include HCI investigators **Leigh Neumayer**, **MD**, professor of surgery, **Philip Bernard**, **MD**, assistant professor of pathology, and **Bryan Welm**, **PhD**, assistant professor of surgery.

"I'm excited by the collaborative atmosphere at Huntsman Cancer Institute," Welm says. "The cooperation between labs and between researchers and clinicians makes it possible to really get things done here."

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#### In the News

**The Power of Television:** Calls and e-mails poured into HCI, and donations shot up at the Huntsman Cancer Foundation (HCF) after talk show host Glenn Beck interviewed HCI founder Jon M. Huntsman in December on CNN Headline News.

Patient and Public Education Director **Donna Branson** says her staff received 260 calls or e-mails based on the show; they got eight times the number of e-mails they normally receive in a month. Inquiries came in from 44 states, Canada, and other countries.

**Alicia Ferrer**, HOPE Guide coordinator, says the website also saw a flurry of activity: 835 cancer awareness quizzes were submitted, compared to a monthly average of 95 for the four previous months. "This is exciting because hundreds of people were introduced to and utilized the cancer education tools on both the HCI website and HOPE Guide website," Ferrer says.

**Heather LeVan**, director of development at HCF, says the foundation received \$104,000 in gifts from people who specified that they had watched the show. That total does not include monthly pledges made that have not yet come in.



Deb Neklason

Founding Family: A married couple who sailed from England to America around 1630 may be the ancestors of hundreds of people alive today who are at risk for a hereditary form of colon cancer, according to results of a study authored by **Deb Neklason**, **PhD**, a member of Huntsman Cancer Institute's colon cancer research team and research assistant professor in the Department of Oncological Sciences at the University of Utah School of Medicine. An article reporting the finding was published in *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology*. Several newspapers, both local and national, have covered the story; you can read the local articles in the *Deseret Morning News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

First siRNA clinical trial: Sancy Leachman, MD, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Dermatology at the University of Utah School of Medicine and director of the Melanoma and Cutaneous Oncology Program at HCI, will begin the first clinical trial to test safety and effectiveness of a "small inhibitory RNA" (siRNA) formulation in skin. The Phase I trial will test a treatment for a rare genetic condition called pachyonychia congenita (PC). The result of a mutation in a gene that produces keratin (a protein in hair, nails, and skin), the disease causes thick, painful calluses on the soles of the feet, among other symptoms.

"The drug is based on a sophisticated technology that has shown great promise in laboratory and animal studies over the past few years. We've decided to bring it into the human realm to benefit a small but vulnerable population," says Leachman.

The Pachyonychia Congenita Project, a Salt Lake Citybased nonprofit organization which simply states its mission as "find a cure," funded research and development of the new drug through a company called TransDerm, which it founded for that purpose.

"If this clinical trial shows the siRNA to be effective in humans, it means much more than relief for people with PC. The trial is also a proof of principle experiment—if successful, it will open huge possibilities for developing



Sancy Leachman

siRNAs to treat all kinds of genetic disorders of this type," Leachman says. For more information about PC and the Pachyonychia Congenita Project, visit pachyonychia.org.

**Read all about it:** Every month, newsworthy information about the latest research and happenings at HCI appears in print, on television, and on the Internet, making a name for HCI in our community, nationally, and across the world. View the latest media coverage.

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## **Events**



HCl employees celebrated the beginning of 2008 on January 11 with heaping plates of breakfast, along with music, gifts, and lively conversation with fellow workers at the Holiday Breakfast Buffet. HCl Executive Director Mary Beckerle said the breakfast, which she hopes will be an annual tradition, is just one way to thank all HCl staff and faculty for their dedication and teamwork.



HCl staff members (from left) Brian Salisbury (Security), Nancy Vu (B. Welm Lab), and Matthew Powers (Ullman Lab) provided music for the Holiday Breakfast Buffet.

Internationalism in medicine: The Utah Chapter American College of Surgeons announces its 2008 meeting, "Surgical Opportunities in the Developing World," to be held at the Hotel Monaco in downtown Salt Lake City on February 2. The one-day meeting includes sessions on surgical volunteerism, sustainability of international surgical projects, and more. Registration is limited to 100 participants; see the registration brochure at hci.utah.edu/internal/index.html.

**Lung lesson:** Students from Entheos, a charter school in Kearns, came to HCI on December 18 for an anti-tobacco presentation by **Lori Maness** and **Cam Torres** in Patient and Public Education. The demonstration features actual pig lungs, both healthy and treated to simulate the effects of smoking, to graphically impress middle-school students with the non-smoking message.



Cam Torres, program coordinator for Hispanic Outreach, pumps up healthy and "smoker's" pig lungs in an anti-tobacco demonstration for students of Entheos, a Kearns charter school.

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# **Promotions and Appointments**



**Dustin Hawkins** 

**Dustin Hawkins**, **MBA**, has been named project administrator and manager of GI Cancer Clinical and Research Programs at HCI. Hawkins has a bachelor's degree in exercise science from Wichita State University and played professional baseball for three years for the Houston Astros. After his baseball career, he worked in sales, marketing, and operations for a logistics company while getting his master's degree in business administration from the University of Phoenix.



Paul Sabin, BSN, MS, (center front) will serve as the program coordinator for Pain Medicine and Palliative Care. Other members of the PMPC program include (clockwise from Sabin) Susan Roberts; Lorene Johnson, APRN; Deborah Thorpe, PhD, APRN; Kim Segal, MPH/HAS; Suzy Simmonds; and Sharon M. Weinstein, MD.

**Paul Sabin**, **BSN**, **MS**, a military veteran with degrees in nursing and health education and over 20 years of management experience, is the new program coordinator for HCI's Pain Medicine and Palliative Care (PMPC) Program. The program provides services to relieve cancer-related suffering and to help patients and families maximize their quality of life.

Sabin graduated with honors in 2005 with a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Rochester and earned a master's degree in health education from the University of Utah. He most recently worked as a clinical nurse at the Orthopaedic Center of the University of Utah. A former Navy Hospital Corpsman who served with the Marine Corps in Viet Nam, Sabin is also the former executive director and chairperson of the Utah Governors' Council on Health and Fitness.

Sabin will serve as the program coordinator for PMPC, joining providers **Sharon M.** Weinstein, MD; Deborah Thorpe, PhD, APRN; Lorene Johnson, APRN, and Amy Horyna, LCSW; as well as **Susan Roberts**, chaplain; **Kim Segal**, MPH/HSA, research associate; and **Suzy Simmonds**, administrative assistant.

## **Awards and Grants**



John M. Hoffman, MD

John M. Hoffman, MD, director of HCI's Molecular Imaging Program, director of nuclear medicine in the Department of Radiology and professor of radiology and neurology in the University of Utah School of Medicine, and medical director for the Utah Center for Advanced Imaging Research (UCAIR), has been appointed to hold the Willard Snow Hansen Presidential Endowed Chair in Cancer Research Established in Loving Memory by His Daughter, Mary H. Boesche. The appointment "recognizes extraordinary effort and achievement" and "marks the holder as one dedicated to excellence," according to the October 1, 2007, letter of appointment from University of Utah President Michael K. Young.

Hoffman's research interests at the University of Utah focus on the use of molecular imaging techniques such as combined positron emission tomography (PET) and

computed tomography (CT) to improve staging and characterization of cancer and more accurately assess patient response to therapies. His research has been widely published in peer-reviewed journals, including the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Nature*, *Radiology*, and *Clinical Cancer Research*.

Hoffman received his undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1977, his medical degree from the University of Colorado in Denver in 1980, and completed his residency in neurology at the University of Washington in Seattle in 1986. He completed a fellowship in nuclear medicine and PET imaging at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1989. He has held faculty appointments at UCLA, Duke University, and Emory University. Before arriving at the University of Utah in 2005, he had been chief of the molecular imaging branch of the National Cancer Institute.

The chair is named for prominent Utah farmer, businessman, state senator, and legislator Willard Snow Hansen. His daughter, Mary Boesche, established the chair to support cancer research, with the hope of finding new cures and treatments for cancer-related disease.

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# **Presentations**



Barbara Graves, PhD

Barbara Graves, PhD, HCI's senior director for laboratory research and chair of the Department of Oncological Sciences at the University of Utah, gave a presentation at Cancer Research UK's Genes and Cancer 2007 meeting held December 9–11 at the University of Warwick, in Coventry, England. She presented the findings of postdoctoral fellows Peter Hollenhorst and Mary Nelson regarding the targeting of ETS proteins to genes and the targeting of the transcriptional co-activator CBP to ETS proteins.

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# Helping HC



It's Radio-a-Thon Time Again: The sixth annual HCI K-Bull 93 Radio-a-Thon will take place live from Fountain Court in South Towne Center in Sandy on Friday and Saturday, February 1–2. The broadcast, to raise money for cancer research at HCI, will start at 5:30 a.m. Friday and run through 8:00 p.m. Saturday.

K-Bull 93 morning personalities, Johnson and Johnson, will kick off the event. The broadcast will feature interviews with HCI founder Jon M. Huntsman, cancer survivors, doctors, and staff from HCI, as well as a special interview with syndicated talk show host Glenn Beck. A simulcast with Beck will take the event to a national audience for the first time. You can support the Radio-a-Thon by either visiting the broadcast booth at South Towne Center or listening to K-Bull 93 February 1–2. For more information, contact **Brooke Hathaway**, Huntsman Cancer Foundation development officer, at bhathaway@huntsmanfoundation.org.

**Hugs for the Holidays:** Ten families had a better holiday season thanks to HCI employees, according to **Kerstin Barney** of Volunteer Services, who coordinated the drive. Three of the 10 families identified as needing help were "adopted" by various HCI departments, and Robert Half Technology in Salt Lake City helped two families, as it has done for the past two years. The remaining five families were helped by the donations of individual employees. Most of the donations were either clothing or gift cards to buy groceries and other basic needs. Some people donated gas cards since many patients travel long distances to their appointments each month.

**Margaret Landvatter** coordinated this year's Navajo Santa program, another annual HCI holiday giving campaign. HCI and University Hospital staff and employees contributed items and cash to assemble 152 hygiene kits for distribution on the Navajo reservation in southeast Utah.

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**News You Can Use** 



Gigi Austria, Oncology Nurse Intern coordinator, far left, with interns Elma Kao, Mandy Jacobs, Heidi Berquist, Tiffany Cupit, Jill Gahlsdorf, Allese Dykman, and Bridgette Murillo; and Sue Childress, HCl director of nursing services.

**2008 Oncology Nurse Program:** A new group of oncology nurse interns started January 2 and will complete their training at the end of April. The new interns are Elma Kao, Mandy Jacobs, Heidi Berquist, Tiffany Cupit, Jill Gahlsdorf, Allese Dykman, and Bridgette Murillo.

The Oncology Nurse Internship is a four-month program for registered nurses pursuing careers in oncology nursing. They spend the first month attending lectures and demonstrations related to oncology nursing at HCH. For the following three months, the interns rotate through all inpatient and outpatient areas. At the end of four months, they apply for open positions on HCH inpatient units. The program requires a two-year commitment to work at HCH with the first year on an inpatient unit.

Improving patient education at HCI: The Patient Education Steering Committee (PESC) would like to thank the 201 people who completed the Patient Education Needs Assessment. The survey identified three weaknesses of HCI's current patient education system: lack of standardization (duplication between departments, inconsistency, and lack of coordinated effort), inadequacy of some information (outdated, not available in Spanish, not available at convenient location), and lack of knowledge among providers and staff about available educational materials.

In the coming year, the PESC will focus on developing a patient education strategic plan, creating solutions for the weaknesses identified above, and reviewing the many excellent suggestions received in the needs assessment. If you have questions or suggestions about improving patient education materials, please contact PESC co-chairs **Donna Branson** (donna.branson@hci.utah.edu; 585-6809) or **Susan Childress** (susan.childress@hci.utah.edu; 587-7884).

**HCI's Bunch of Big Losers:** HCI's holiday weight competitions—the "Don't Gain, Maintain" interdepartmental and individual challenges—garnered about 50% more participants in their second year, according to **Amanda Luekenga**, dietitian in the Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness Center, which sponsored the contests.

**Loretta Robles** of Materials Management was the "biggest loser," AKA the winner, in the "Don't Gain, Maintain" individual challenge, taking off 15.5 pounds. Because

the contest is based on percentage of body weight lost, **Kurt Spangler**, a security officer who lost 20 pounds, placed second. **Janet Bloch**, oncology nurse practitioner and director of the Wellness Center, placed third with a loss of 10 pounds. Twenty-five other employees lost between 2% and 6% percent of their body weight during the challenge, earning them honorable mentions.

In the interdepartmental challenge, the Security Department team, consisting of Spangler and **Brian Salisbury**, took first place. Other top departments were Materials Management, Radiology Oncology, Nutrition Care, and Communications.

Prize sponsorship came from Hugger Mugger Yoga Products, Salt Lake Running Company, University of Utah Field House, Peak Academy, Einstein's Bagels, Jamba Juice, Great Harvest, and the Wellness Center.



Loretta Robles of Materials Management took first place in the "Don't Gain, Maintain" individual competition. She was careful about what she ate without meticulous caloriecounting and self-deprivation. She also increased her exercise by walking more and walking faster.



The bike was Janet Bloch's friend in the contest. She worked off her weight by watching what she ate and pedaling away calories.



Kurt Spangler (I) was secondplace winner in the individual holiday weight loss challenge. His three-pronged approach included exercise, diet, and motivation. He worked out with fellow Security Department member Brian Salisbury (r); together they won first place in the interdepartmental challenge.

**Science Lite:** HCI announces a new science seminar series designed for nonscientist HCI employees. Calling it "Science Lite," organizers bill it as the "more understandable and less mystifying" choice. The kickoff seminar will be HCI investigator **Deb Neklason**, **PhD**, speaking on her recently published study identifying a founder family with a colon cancer predisposition gene who came to the United States in the early 17th century. More than 7,000 living descendants have been identified.

The series starts in late February; watch for the time and location details in an HCI news e-mail and on bulletin boards in the coming weeks.



**Get centered:** Read the latest information in the January issue of the Cancer Learning Center Newsletter from HCI's Patient and Pubic Education Department.

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# **CCSG Program News**

This month's feature highlights **Lisa A. Cannon-Albright**, **PhD**, a member of the Cancer Center Support Grant (CCSG) Cancer Control and Population Sciences Program.

Albright is a professor in the Department of Biomedical Informatics and chief of the Division of Genetic Epidemiology at the University of Utah School of Medicine. As a genetic epidemiologist, she is involved in understanding the genetic contribution to disease. Albright, who has been at the University of Utah since 1988, has used Utah Cancer Registry data for more than 28 years to define the familial/heritable component to cancer. The cancer registry is linked to Utah Population Database genealogical data. Albright has also used this resource to identify and study highrisk cancer pedigrees and to localize and isolate cancer predisposition genes. She collaborated in the studies that identified the first melanoma gene (p16), the first two breast-cancer genes (BRCA1, BRCA2), and the first prostate-cancer gene (ELAC2/HPC2).

Albright currently directs and is involved in studies of prostate cancer, melanoma, breast cancer, pituitary tumors, gallbladder cancer, stomach cancer, sarcomas, and colon cancer, as well as the continued exploration of the genetic component of a wide variety of other health-related traits using population-based resources. This work is sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, the University of Utah, and the Deseret Foundation.

She has collaborated extensively with University of Utah researchers, as well as researchers elsewhere, to study a variety of diseases. Her current cancer-focused collaborations with HCI investigators involve Sancy Leachman, MD, PhD, and the HCI Melanoma Program; R. Lor Randall, MD, and the HCI Sarcoma Array Research Group (SARC); Randy Burt, MD, on colorectal cancer; Andrew Soisson, MD, on endometrial cancer; and Robert Glasgow, MD, on cancers of the gallbladder and stomach. Albright is also working with Deborah Blumenthal, MD, (previously at HCI and now in Israel) on brain cancer, and CCSG member David Viskochil, MD, in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Utah School of Medicine on neurofibromatosis.

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