

Compassionate

CARE

Scottsdale Healthcare Conducts Clinical Trials for Late-Stage Cancer Patients **By Pete Christensen**

For previous generations, a diagnosis of cancer was rare and ominous. It usually was considered a death sentence. Today, it seems like everyone has at least one friend or family member afflicted, yet their chances of recovery are better than ever before.

A Scottsdale facility is at the forefront of care and research. In a progressive move, Scottsdale Healthcare has created the Scottsdale Clinical Research Institute to support world-class medical research in its hospitals. Heading up SCRI is Mark Slater, PhD.

"This is highly unusual in a community care setting. I really think we have a hidden jewel here that people should be made aware of," observes Dr. Slater, whose background includes positions in large academic medical centers.

A keystone of SCRI is the strategic alliance between Scottsdale Healthcare and the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen) to provide cutting-edge cancer research, personalized medicine, and treatments targeted to the individual.

On a personal level, this means that patients that have exhausted therapies such as radiation and chemotherapy without results now have additional innovative treatments available.

SCRI's research programs are housed in the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center at Scottsdale Healthcare, on the Scottsdale Healthcare Shea medical campus near Loop 101 and Shea Blvd.

Two buildings comprise the facility. One is dedicated to treatment and support of cancer patients, including oncologist offices, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, a cancer information library open to the public, a cancer exercise program, education and support groups,



a chapel, and even a boutique dedicated to the needs of cancer patients.

The second building houses the Debi and Jerry Bisgrove Research Pavilion. This is where physician scientists in the TGen Clinical Research Services at Scottsdale Healthcare conduct groundbreaking genome and molecular studies, along with experimental treatments. When traditional therapy doesn't work, cancer patients can participate in Phase I clinical trials. These trials are great prospects for patients with tumors unresponsive to traditional treatments.

A warm and comforting environment awaits patients visiting the center. Large windows and natural colors give everything a very subdued feel. Scottsdale Healthcare designed the building to give the impression of bringing the outdoors in, which creates a uniquely calming effect.

The two buildings are connected by a beautiful skywalk. Dr. Slater says that he

feels that the skywalk represents the connection between translational research and clinical treatments. From a practical standpoint, having these two facilities adjacent to each other allows community oncologists and Scottsdale Healthcare to get new treatments to patients much faster than ever before.

It's important to note that targeted therapies are customized to the individual and to whatever vulnerability their tumors have. Targeted therapies have a success ratio between 35 to 60 percent. This new approach is to find and attack the vulnerability of the tumor itself. To accomplish this, a molecular profile of the individual's tumor is created that highlights the tumor's weaknesses.

Dr. Slater says that traditional therapies concentrate on poisoning the tumor. The accompanying danger is that the patient is also poisoned and may experience illness and extreme discomfort.

The Scottsdale Clinical Research

Institute was established in 2005, and through the generous philanthropy of the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, the Stardust Foundation, and others, it has grown into a world-class program. Some of the treatments it has offered are the first in the world application of new therapies in patients.

SCRI's current goal is to get up to 300 patients into Phase I cancer clinical trials.

Scottsdale Healthcare recruited some of the nation's best researchers for its cancer clinical trials program. The chief scientific officer is Daniel Von Hoff, M.D., a world-renowned cancer researcher specializing in new drug development and pancreatic cancer studies. Ramesh Ramanathan, M.D. is medical director of TCRS and director of the gastrointestinal oncology program. Raoul Tibes, M.D., PhD specializes in leukemia research and directs the hematological malignancies program. Glen Wise, M.D. is director of the thoracic oncology program.

SCRI also collaborates with numerous other facilities has additional emphasis areas including cardiovascular health, diabetes, trauma and neurosciences. It is conducting 185 active studies, 80 lead studies, and another 125 substudies.

The center's cardiovascular department, led by Kris Vijay, M.D., David Rizik, M.D. and Vijay Swarup, M.D., is developing new medical devices that are less expensive and less invasive to the patient. They also are studying the link between diabetes and heart disease. Some of today's common heart treatments, like drug eluting stents, were first tested in clinical trials at Scottsdale Healthcare.

Ron Korn, M.D. is a radiologist at Scottsdale Healthcare and is involved in various studies of radiation exposure. The goal is to determine exposures that are the safest and best approaches to diagnostic imaging, to produce the best possible image with the least effect on the patient. Better diagnostics allow for faster and better treatments.

"Patients are better educated than ever before. It's important that while we make these advances in treatments that we also get the word out on their availability to the public. People should know their options," says Dr. Slater,



Dr. Mark Slater, PhD stands before the new Cancer Care Center at SHC

commenting on the innovations taking place at Scottsdale Healthcare.

A Care Center Coordinator serves as a liaison between the patient, hospitals and physicians. It is a pivotal role because over half the center's patients are from outside of Scottsdale.

Dr. Slater adds, "When you give people new options and alternatives, you give them hope. Because we deal with extreme cases, we have to be careful to offer encouragement and sensitivity, while always being honest with our evaluations."

He was quick to praise his colleagues, saying, "We have the most dedicated staff I've ever known. Because they work so closely with the patients, they build a bond with them that lasts forever."

The financing of medicine is inescapable. The Scottsdale Clinical Research Institute is funded by research grants, philanthropy, contracts for clinical trials and evaluation, and support from Scottsdale Healthcare. Clinical trials often are free to patients, but physician fees for routine care are paid through the insurance of the individual.

Sustained funding through philanthropy is essential to the Center's work to continue breakthroughs in new medical treatments.

Dr. Slater comments, "We need people that can share the vision with us. Scottsdale Healthcare and the Scottsdale Research Institute are conducting cutting-edge research, partnering with TGen to focus on clinical and transitional research and personalized medicine."

Dr. Slater acknowledges that the medical profession can be overwhelming, but says, "This is a place where the rewards of comforting people with hope and healing far outweigh any of our personal difficulties." ■