



DEIRDRE HAMILL/THE REPUBLIC

Clinical research associate Marvin Forsythe puts together cancer-research kits for a study at Scottsdale Healthcare at the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center.

On the
cutting
EDGE

Scottsdale Healthcare establishes itself as a leader in clinical research for cancer, cardiovascular disease and trauma.

PAGE 3

Scottsdale Healthcare a research leader

Hospital, TGen team on trials to aid patients

By Diana Balazs

THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

Scottsdale Healthcare has carved a niche as a leader in groundbreaking clinical research.

The non-profit hospital system, known for the care it provides the community through its three Scottsdale-based hospitals, is conducting promising clinical drug trials that offer new hope to patients with pancreatic and other cancers, cardiovascular disease and trauma.

Mark Slater is vice president of research at the Scottsdale Clinical Research Institute at the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center, 10460 N. 92nd St. The institute serves as the umbrella organization for the 180 trials now taking place at Scottsdale Healthcare facilities.

Scottsdale Healthcare serves as a primary clinical research site for the Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen).

As part of their partnership, laboratory research is done at TGen, and Scottsdale Healthcare administers the drugs to patients.

"A lot of people don't know about the research that's being conducted here because this is a community hospital, but I think what's unique has been the collaborations we have with groups like TGen," Slater said.

Scottsdale Healthcare's physician researchers are paired with scientists at TGen. By working together, the goal is to speed up the discovery process from lab to bedside, Slater said.

Scottsdale Healthcare's flagship program involves cancer clinical trials held at the TGen Clinical Research Services at Scottsdale Healthcare located inside the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center. The cancer center is on the campus of Scottsdale Healthcare Shea Medical Center.

About 40 percent of the clinical trials being conducted by Scottsdale Healthcare involve potential new therapies to treat cancer.

The research includes:

» Testing the effectiveness of treating pancreatic cancer patients with a combination of Abraxane, a drug manufactured by Abraxis BioScience and typically used for breast cancer with a standard chemotherapy drug gemcitabine.

More information

Patients who want to know more about new therapies available through the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center can call Joyce Ingold at 480-323-1339 or e-mail jingold@shc.org. The toll-free number is 877-273-3713.

» A potential new treatment for lung cancer. In August, Dr. Glen Weiss, a clinical investigator and director of thoracic oncology at the Scottsdale Clinical Research Institute, presented the results of promising Phase I clinical trials of Threshold Pharmaceuticals' TH-302 drug at the World Conference on Lung Cancer.

» Serving as the lead site for the "Hedgehog" clinical trial featured Sept. 2 in the "New England Journal of Medicine." Hedgehog study results indicate effectiveness of the drug GDC-0449 for advanced skin cancer, as well as potential use for other cancers.

Clinical trials in the cancer center are largely funded through philanthropic donations to the Scottsdale Healthcare Foundation and by grants, such as an \$18 million grant toward pancreatic cancer from the charitable program Stand Up To Cancer.

The TGen Clinical Research Service at Scottsdale Healthcare clinic treats individuals on an outpatient basis. The clinic conducts what are known as Phase I clinical trials with patients whose cancers have not responded to standard treatment.

Slater said the focus is on personalized medicine, using molecular diagnostics to understand the cancer's vulnerabilities and to target individualized therapies. In other words, it's about finding the right drug to work on a specific cancer.

"We like to think of it as precision medicine," Slater said.

Slater said every effort is made to make the patients participating in the clinical trials feel they are in a caring environment.

"We want to make sure this is not research in a sterile laboratory or in a basement somewhere. This is really integrated with the clinical care," Slater said.

The clinical trials are held five days a



DEIRDRE HAMILL/THE REPUBLIC

Dr. Ramesh Ramanathan (right), medical director of the TGen Clinical Research Services at Scottsdale Healthcare, and Mark Slater, vice president of research at the Scottsdale Clinical Research Institute at the Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center, team up.

week at the TGen Clinical Research Services at Scottsdale Healthcare clinic. Patients can spend up to 14 hours a day at the center receiving treatment and being observed, Slater said. There are four beds for the sickest of patients, plus 12 infusion stations, where medications are given.

All costs associated with a clinical trial are paid for by the sponsor of the trial as part of the research, Slater said.

Dr. Ramesh Ramanathan is the medical director of the TGen Clinical Research Services at Scottsdale Healthcare. Ramanathan said the partnership with TGen is the best of both worlds.

"We have an academic environment, but we are still able to move very quickly and get new drugs into patients very

quickly," he said.

His expertise is gastrointestinal cancer, specifically of the colon and pancreas. Ramanathan said the research of the combination of the drugs Abraxane and gemcitabine to fight pancreatic cancer is most promising; in the clinical trials, the drugs caused tumors to shrink.

"It's one of the most difficult cancers to treat and there really hasn't been any major breakthrough in the last 20 years," Ramanathan said.

Ramanathan said working on promising research is why he joined Scottsdale Healthcare.

"It's the promise of new treatments for patients, making their lives better. It's a unique program that we have," he said.