

# Investigator to Cancer Center Bulletin Investigator

A publication of the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center

## Grand Rounds

The speaker for the upcoming Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center Grand Rounds is Dr. Matthew Ellis, head of medical oncology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and director of the breast health program at the Alvin J. Siteman Cancer Center at Washington University and Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

Dr. Ellis also is co-director of clinical and translational research at the Siteman Cancer Center.

The lecture will be held May 1 from 11:30 am. to 12:30 p.m. in the T. Boone Pickens Biomedical Building and Conference Center (NG) 3.112.

The title of Dr. Ellis' lecture is "Luminal Type Breast Cancer – New Insights and Treatments."

Dr. Ellis's research focuses on the use of aromatase inhibitors and targeted therapy in treating breast cancer.

Recently, he and a group of researchers at collaborating institutions determined that a set of 50 genes can be used to reliably identify the four known types of breast cancer. Using this 50-gene set, oncologists can potentially predict the most effective therapy for each breast-tumor type and thereby personalize breast-cancer treatment for patients.

## Parkland Outreach and Clinical Trials

To ensure delivery of cutting-edge cancer care to patients throughout Dallas, the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center is expanding its community outreach efforts by promoting clinical trials, especially among underrepresented and medically underserved populations.

Dr. M. Obinna Nwaneri, assistant professor of internal medicine in the division of hematology/ oncology, recently joined the Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center as the medical director of clinical cancer research at Parkland Memorial Hospital. Parkland is UT Southwestern Medical Center's primary adult teaching hospital.

In this newly created role, Dr. Nwaneri is developing approaches for enhancing accrual to oncology clinical trials. He also is providing onsite guidance to physicians and researchers conducting cancer clinical trials at Parkland.

"We are creating links with the Parkland system and the community so that patients can access more of our cancer clinical trials," Dr. Nwaneri said. "It's gratifying to see how much support we will be able to offer patients who are receiving some of the most devastating news they've heard in their lives."

Dr. Nwaneri plans a multipronged approach, including:

- > increasing visibility and awareness of clinical trials at Parkland to both patients and staff;
- > streamlining the cancer clinical trial enrollment and education process; and
- > improving communication and collaborations with Parkland and the Community Outreach Primary Care (COPC) clinics.

In the clinical setting, the Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center also has added 10 half-day, nonteaching clinics to provide faster access for newly diagnosed cancer patients being seen at the recently renovated hematology and medical oncology clinics at Parkland. Many of these staff positions, which are supported by the cancer center, will reduce wait times to see an oncologist, improve



Dr. M. Obinna Nwaneri

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**U**T SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL recently received the Commission on

Cancer (CoC) Outstanding Achievement Award from the American College of Surgeons.

The award recognizes programs that strive for excellence in providing quality care to cancer patients. Facilities receive the designation through rigorous onsite evaluations that must demonstrate compliance within a series of cancer-program standards, including cancer committee leadership, cancer data management, clinical services, research, community outreach and quality improvement.

In 2008 programs at 478 community-based facilities, teaching hospitals, National Cancer

Institute-designated comprehensive centers and network cancer centers underwent site visits and evaluations by physician surveyors. UT Southwestern University Hospital is among 93 of these facilities (19 percent) nationwide to receive this designation.

There are currently more than 1,400 CoC-approved cancer programs in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, representing close to 25 percent of all hospitals. These CoC facilities diagnose and/or treat 80 percent of newly diagnosed cancer patients each year.

“This designation is another step in our goal of providing the best possible cancer care in North Texas,” said Dr. James Willson, director of the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center at UT South-

western. “It also highlights our collaborations among programs in clinical care, scientific research and cancer prevention.”

Established in 1922 by the American College of Surgeons, the Commission on Cancer is a consortium of professional organizations dedicated to improving survival and quality of life for cancer patients through prevention, research, education and the monitoring of comprehensive quality care.

Approval by the CoC is given only to those facilities that have voluntarily committed to providing the highest level of quality cancer care and that undergo a review of their performance. To maintain approval, facilities must undergo an onsite review every three years.



Dr. James Willson

## Parkland Outreach and Clinical Trials

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overall patient care and will ultimately increase the opportunity to accrue more patients to cancer clinical trials.

The cancer center also has committed more than \$280,000 to support the research enterprise at Parkland, including research personnel start-up fees and drug costs.

Dr. Nwaneri’s plan for improvement in enrollment of underserved populations was developed in collaboration with Dr. Lovell Jones at the Center for Research of Minority Health (CRMH) at UT M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

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— DR. M. OBINNA NWANERI

Dr. Nwaneri spent time with Dr. Jones reviewing and discussing the functioning and overall organization of the CRMH center in order to bring some of his expertise and experiences to Dallas and Parkland.

The Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center also is supporting a nurse navigator position at Parkland to enhance the process of enrollment and provide a smoother transition of patients enrolled in cancer clinical trials. In addition, a bilingual research coordinator will aid the cancer center’s Disease Oriented Teams research staff by screening patients in various oncology clinics and notifying physicians of potentially eligible patients.

Earlier this year, Dr. Nwaneri also hired Alisha Hill as a part-time program coordinator for outreach services to help establish

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relationships in the Hispanic and African-American communities in Dallas through the COPC clinics.

“By working with various community-based groups in the Dallas area and expanding activities toward establishing relationships with referring physicians, we will ultimately be able to better serve racial and ethnic minorities and underserved populations, and ultimately decrease disparities in participation in cancer clinical trials,” Dr. Nwaneri said. “The long-term goal is to build trust as well as awareness of the utility for patients to be enrolled in cancer clinical trials that we have available at Parkland and at the cancer center.”

The Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center also has started research initiatives at clinical sites to examine how barriers can be reduced and care can be enhanced,



including how participation in clinical trials can be increased. A major collaborator in this project is Dr. Celette Sugg Skinner, associate director of population research for the cancer center and co-leader of the community-health research initiative for UT Southwestern’s Clinical Translational Research Center.

For example, Dr. Nwaneri and Dr. Simon Craddock Lee, assistant

professor of clinical sciences, will lead a project to explore barriers to clinical trials accrual at cancer center sites. The purpose is to determine which institutional mechanisms limit enrollment of patients in clinical trials and how institutional culture within and across organizational units might adversely affect patient access to research, particularly participation in oncology studies.

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