Neuwirth Gift will Advance Translational Research

Thanks to a transformational gift from Stephen and Nataly Neuwirth, the Beatrice Kleinberg Neuwirth Fund for Pancreatic and Lung Cancer Research will support several aspects of translational research at Yale Cancer Center.

A partner at the New York law firm Quinn Emanuel, Stephen Neuwirth has made a career in antitrust litigation since graduating from Yale College in 1984 and Yale Law School in 1987. But cancer has taken a toll on his family: His mother – for whom the new research fund is named – died of pancreatic cancer and his sister-in-law was successfully treated at Smilow Cancer Hospital just a few years ago.

Led by Mr. Neuwirth’s undergrad college roommate at Yale, Roy S. Herbst, MD, PhD, Associate Director for Translational Research and Chief of Medical Oncology, the research efforts supported by the Neuwirth Fund will identify drugs that bind and inhibit Ras, a commonly mutated gene in cancer. Tumors that are Ras mutated rarely respond to chemotherapy, making them an important target for next generation targeted therapies.

"Ras is an elusive target," Dr. Herbst said. "So far, no one has made major inroads with this group of mutations – it’s one that needs a totally out of the box approach. Steve and Nataly’s gift makes this possible." ♡

Jeremy Kortmansky, MD
Medical Director, Smilow Cancer Hospital Care Center – North Haven

Your office integrated into the Smilow family just over three years ago. What has been the biggest change for your daily practice?

Our daily routine is quite similar since joining Smilow. The Care Center physicians remain hands-on in the care of our patients: we see our own patients in the hospital, have office hours daily, and return our own calls. We have largely maintained the same administrative staff, PCAs, and nursing staff as before, and we work well together. Since joining Smilow, we have also added important services like on-site nutrition counseling, social work, and clinical research. The hardest change has been adjusting to the mandates of the electronic medical record. But I suspect this is not unique to Yale. Also, I drink more coffee.

Have your professional goals changed over the last 3 years?

My primary focus remains providing state-of-the-art care in a compassionate manner. However, melding the convenience and service of a community office with the resources of a major comprehensive cancer center is no easy task. In my role as Medical Director, I work closely with the Smilow administration to realize this vision. In doing so, I have realigned my interests in clinical operations, research, and teaching. I am very excited about the future.

Making clinical trials available to patients in community offices is a priority for Yale. Are your patients benefiting?

I am very proud of our efforts to build a clinical research program in the community. The importance of clinical trials to find better treatments cannot be overstated. In the past, patients balked at the opportunity to participate because of the inconveniences of traveling into New Haven or other major cities. While we don’t always know whether an investigational therapy will become the next true advance, patients still benefit from participating in clinical trials. This includes early access to promising treatments that may not otherwise be available and multiple levels of oversight of their treatment. It is a privilege to work with the clinical and research staff at Yale that make this level of care possible.

How are you able to focus your expertise on GI cancers in a community office setting?

I have had an interest in GI cancers since I arrived to this community 10 years ago. I have established important relationships with primary care providers, gastroenterologists, and surgeons within the community, and I am grateful for the trust they have in me to care for their patients. To maintain my level of expertise, I have aligned with the Gastrointestinal Cancers Program at Smilow and participate regularly in the tumor board and the research program meetings. Nonetheless, practicing in the community requires a broad competence in treating several types of malignancies. The scope of my practice includes patients with breast cancer, lung cancer, lymphoma, and many other malignancies.