

News Room News Releases

Researcher at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center Receives \$250,000 Carcinoid Tumor Research Grant Caring for Carcinoid Foundation supports studies by laboratory of Lee M. Ellis, M.D.

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The Caring for Carcinoid Foundation has awarded a \$250,000 grant for carcinoid research under the direction of Lee M. Ellis, M.D., professor of surgery and cancer biology and The John E. and Dorothy J. Harris Professor in Gastrointestinal Cancer Research at The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Carcinoid is a rare form of neuroendocrine cancer for which there are no effective therapies for unresectable metastatic or locally advanced disease. According to the American Cancer Society, approximately 11,000 to 12,000 carcinoid tumors are diagnosed each year in the United States, about half of which occur in the digestive tract.

The Caring for Carcinoid Foundation is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to finding a cure for carcinoid cancer. All fund-raising proceeds go directly to research in carcinoid and related neuroendocrine cancers. In fewer than two years, the Caring for Carcinoid Foundation has awarded more than \$2 million in grants. The foundation also provides up-to-date information to patients, doctors and researchers through its Web site, www.caringforcarcinoid.org, newsletters and discussion forums.

Ellis describes his research as a "team effort" shared with James C. Yao, M.D., assistant professor in the Department of Gastrointestinal Medical Oncology, and Asif Rashid, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Pathology, along with trainees in his laboratory.

"Our greatest responsibility is to the patients," says Ellis. "We are intent on doing good research and rapidly applying our findings to the clinical care of patients with advanced stage carcinoid tumors."

Ellis' research objectives are twofold:

- Develop human midgut carcinoid tumor cell lines (cells taken from human carcinoid tumors and grown in the laboratory) to help establish models for research at M. D. Anderson and elsewhere.
- Characterize the cell lines by identifying and validating molecular targets that warrant further investigation in novel therapies.

Ellis' lab already has established CNDT 2.5 - one of only two human midgut carcinoid tumor cell lines in the world.

"We will identify proteins that mediate tumor growth by standard molecular biologic techniques," says Ellis. "Once we identify these targets, we will use combinations of targeted therapies to inhibit growth in a novel model of liver metastasis in mice."

Ellis hopes the two-year project will produce lab findings of significant interest to generate new hypotheses for carcinoid therapies that may be further investigated and eventually tested in clinical trials.

"We are grateful for the support of the Caring for Carcinoid Foundation," says Ellis. "With this grant we have a base for further laboratory investigations that we hope will reveal new ways to treat carcinoid tumors."

Nancy O'Hagan, who was diagnosed with metastatic carcinoid cancer in July 2000 at age 29, is founder and president of the Caring for Carcinoid Foundation.

"I know the lonely feeling of fighting an incurable cancer that receives little governmental research funding and little pharmaceutical company interest," she says. "We at the Caring for Carcinoid Foundation are committed to scientific

collaboration and are delighted to work with Dr. Ellis and his extraordinary M. D. Anderson team. Their teamwork will help lead the way to significant advances in our understanding and treatment of carcinoid and related neuroendocrine cancers."

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