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## **Researchers from The Cancer Institute of New Jersey Present Findings at International Conference** *AACR Highlights Include Future Treatment Implications for Melanoma and Ovarian Cancer*

**New Brunswick, N.J., April 16, 2008** –Several distinguished basic and clinical investigators from The Cancer Institute of New Jersey (CINJ) are showcasing advances in laboratory, clinical and translational research this week at the five-day American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) meeting in San Diego, which concludes today. The work represented by CINJ members is among the 6,000 abstracts being presented at the annual gathering, which is featuring more than 17,000 researchers, healthcare professionals, and patient advocates from around the globe. CINJ is a Center of Excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

Among this year's abstract presentations is a study testing the effectiveness of the drug Riluzole on those diagnosed with Stage III or Stage IV advanced melanoma, who are slated to have their lesion surgically removed. Riluzole is used in those being treated for ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, which affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord.

The investigative team, which includes CINJ surgical oncologists James S. Goydos, M.D., and Jonathan H. Lee, M.D., who also both hold faculty positions in the Department of Surgery at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; and Suzie Chen, professor of chemical biology at the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy of Rutgers University, says the aim is to see if growth of the disease can be slowed. Currently, patients with melanoma only have a five-year survival rate of less than ten-percent. According to the American Cancer Society, nearly 2,300 new cases of melanoma are expected to be diagnosed this year in New Jersey with 62,000 new cases expected nationwide.

Another study with significant implications for future cancer treatment was highlighted by Lorna Rodriguez, M.D., Ph.D., chief of gynecologic oncology at CINJ and associate professor of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. Dr. Rodriguez is the lead investigator and author of findings of a study looking at the effects of a mineral called selenium in combination with standard treatment for ovarian cancer, which is expected to claim more than 15,000 lives nationwide this year, with 480 in New Jersey.

Currently, the standard of care involves the drugs carboplatin and paclitaxel, which have shown the ability to shrink ovarian cancer tumors; however, that shrinkage may not last for a long period due to drug resistance. Previous data shows that selenium inhibits the development of a tumor's resistance to carboplatin; therefore, Rodriguez and her team are coupling selenium with the two drugs with the hope of preventing or slowing drug resistance.

The CINJ team – which includes gynecologic oncologists Darlene Gibbon, M.D.; Mira Hellmann, M.D.; Wilberto Nieves-Neira, M.D.; and Ami Vaidya, M.D.; Director of Pharmacy, Susan Goodin, PharmD, FCCP, BCOP; pharmacologist Murugesan Gounder, Ph.D.; research teaching specialist Neelakandan Muthukumar, and Associate Director for Clinical Science, Eric Rubin, M.D. – is planning Phase II studies for patients with ovarian and endometrial cancers in the future.

With more than 183,000 new cases of breast cancer expected to be diagnosed this year nationwide – with 6,300 new cases in New Jersey, there was much focus by CINJ investigators on the development of better prognostic indicators for young women with breast cancer.

One poster presentation was made by the team including CINJ Chair of Radiation Oncology, Bruce G. Haffty, M.D., -- who also is a professor and chair of the Department of Radiology Oncology at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School – and led by David Axelrod, Ph.D., professor of genetics at Rutgers University. They conducted research involving the cancer-suppressing p53 gene to determine whether use of nuclear analysis of previously gathered tissue samples would distinguish different survival outcomes for breast cancer patients.

Another poster highlighting prognostic indicators in breast cancer was presented by Kim Hirshfield, M.D., Ph.D., CINJ medical oncologist and assistant professor of medicine at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; and CINJ member Diptee Kulkarni, Ph.D.; with work done in collaboration with Dr. Haffty and Arnold J. Levine, Ph.D., CINJ member and professor of pediatrics and biochemistry at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. Their research looks at how variations in DNA sequences impact a gene known as PERP in the death of cancer cells and whether reduction of chemotherapy and radiation-induced cell death corresponding to those variants would lead to a higher risk of breast cancer recurrence.

Meanwhile, a pair of world-renowned researchers at CINJ – including Dr. Levine – received top honors during the annual conference.

CINJ Interim Director, Joseph R. Bertino, M.D., who also is a university professor of medicine and pharmacology at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, is the recipient of the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual AACR-Joseph H. Burchenal Memorial Award for Outstanding Achievements in Clinical Research, while Levine, received the Kirk A. Landon-AACR Prize for Basic Cancer Research.

### **The AACR-Joseph H. Burchenal Memorial Award**

The AACR-Joseph H. Burchenal Memorial Award recognizes outstanding achievement in clinical cancer research and honors the late Dr. Joseph Burchenal, who was a past president of AACR and a leader in the cancer field. According to the association, Dr. Bertino is being honored this year for his contributions to the development of novel cancer therapeutics. He has been recognized internationally through the years for his role in finding curative treatments in the areas of leukemia and lymphoma.

Bertino says he feels honored, “AACR provides a forum for the world’s leading cancer researchers to share the most comprehensive information on the latest developments in the field. I have been privileged to work with outstanding students, post-doctorals and faculty members over the years at Yale, Memorial Sloan-Kettering and for the past six years at CINJ. Progress has been impressive, but we have much work to do to eradicate cancer.”

### **The Kirk A. Landon Prize for Basic Cancer Research**

The Kirk A. Landon Prize for Basic Cancer Research, according to the AACR, is among the largest awards in the world offered to cancer researchers from a professional society of their peers. It is awarded to “an outstanding scientist who has made seminal cancer research discoveries, which have accelerated progress against cancer and have implications for future discoveries and contributions to cancer research.” Levine is best known for his work involving the discovery of the p53 tumor suppressor gene, which has long been considered a building block in molecular cancer research.

He notes, “While we have come a long way, much discovery still remains in p53 study. It is through continued collaboration through such events as the AACR Annual Meeting that we will achieve our goals

in unlocking the mysteries of cancer. And it is through the support of such awards that will allow for the tools necessary to facilitate the next generation of cancer discoveries.”

An unrestricted cash award of \$100,000 from the Kirk A. and Dorothy P. Landon Foundation and the AACR will be awarded to Levine.

**About The Cancer Institute of New Jersey**

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is the state’s first and only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, and is dedicated to improving the prevention, detection, treatment and care of patients with cancer. CINJ’s physician-scientists engage in translational research, transforming their laboratory discoveries into clinical practice quite literally bringing research to life. The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is a center of excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. To support CINJ, please call the Cancer Institute of New Jersey Foundation at 1-888-333-CINJ.

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey Network is comprised of hospitals throughout the state and provides a mechanism to rapidly disseminate important discoveries into the community. Partner Hospital: Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. Affiliate Hospitals: Bayshore Community Hospital, CentraState Healthcare System, Cooper University Hospital\*, Jersey Shore University Medical Center, JFK Medical Center, Morristown Memorial Hospital, Overlook Hospital, Raritan Bay Medical Center, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Hamilton (CINJ-Hamilton), Saint Peter’s University Hospital, Somerset Medical Center, Southern Ocean County Hospital, The University Hospital/UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School\*, and University Medical Center at Princeton. \*Academic Affiliate

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