

ASCO Announces Dr. Julie R. Gralow as New Chief Medical Officer

Julie R. Gralow, MD, FACP, FASCO, Professor of Medical Oncology and Director of Breast Medical Oncology at the University of Washington, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, and the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, has been named Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of ASCO. She is a highly respected leader in the field of clinical oncology with deep expertise in patient care, research, education, and global health. She will succeed current CMO and Executive Vice President Richard L. Schilsky, MD, FACP, FSCT, FASCO, who retired in February 2021. She began her new position on February 15, 2021.



JULIE R.
GRALOW, MD,
FACP, FASCO

“Julie has all the qualities we were looking for in ASCO’s new CMO,” said ASCO President Lori J. Pierce, MD, FASTRO, FASCO. “She has a vision for the future of oncology backed up by a significant record of accomplishments in clinical cancer care and research. She knows how to lead large, multidisciplinary teams. And she is a thoughtful and compassionate person. I know she will provide wise counsel as we work together to advance ASCO’s mission.”

The CMO provides medical and scientific leadership for ASCO’s research endeavors, public policy initiatives, communications efforts, and global programs and services that promote high-quality cancer care, as well as fundraising for ASCO’s affiliated foundation, Conquer Cancer. The CMO is a member of ASCO’s Executive Leadership Team and reports to the CEO. To fill the position, ASCO engaged the minority-owned executive search firm Bridge Partners, which conducted an extensive search process and presented the organization with a diverse, exceptionally talented pool of candidates.

“This is a pivotal time for ASCO and in the broader field of oncology,” said ASCO CEO Clifford A. Hudis, MD, FACP, FASCO. “The pace of scientific progress has never been greater, but COVID-19 has brought challenges to virtually every aspect of cancer research and care. I look forward to having Julie on our leadership team as we navigate these unprecedented times while remaining focused on improving the care of patients during the pandemic and beyond.”

Gralow’s impressive experience and contributions to the field embody the qualifications the ASCO Board of Directors and senior leaders sought in a CMO candidate. These include a passion for and track record of accomplishments in cancer medicine; experience in clinical research and global oncology; an in-depth understanding of the current trends and issues affecting community and academic clinical practice; a deep commitment to advancing equity in cancer care; and a leader with outstanding communication and interpersonal skills who is trusted and respected around the world.

A long-time volunteer on numerous ASCO committees, task forces, and guidelines groups; a mentor of young oncologists through various ASCO initiatives; and a lecturer for ASCO’s international courses, Gralow possesses a firm grasp of the organization’s mission, priorities, and operations that will serve her well in this new role.

“My relationship with ASCO began in 1995, when I received an ASCO Career Development Award that ignited my career in oncology,” said Gralow. “For the past 25 years, ASCO has provided me with many opportunities for learning and growth, as it has for many other oncology professionals. By advancing our field’s knowledge, ASCO has made an enormous difference in the care of people with cancer, including my own patients. I have tremendous admiration for the organization and am honored to contribute to it as CMO.”

Gralow is a board-certified medical oncologist and one of the nation’s leading breast cancer specialists. She has spent most of her career at the University of Washington, where she joined the faculty in 1994. She subsequently rose through the ranks to become a professor in the Department of Medicine and has served in numerous roles at the university, including Director of the Women’s Cancer Genetics and Risk Reduction Clinic. Since 2011, she has been a professor in the Clinical Research Division of the Seattle-based Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. She currently serves as the Jill Bennett Endowed Professor of Breast Cancer at the University of Washington School of Medicine and Medical Director of Women’s Cancer-Related Population Health at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, a world-renowned cancer

treatment center that brings together the leading cancer specialists of Fred Hutchinson, Seattle Children’s, and UW Medicine.

Gralow brings extensive expertise in global cancer care and education to the role of ASCO CMO. In 2003, she founded the Women’s Empowerment Cancer Advocacy Network (WE CAN), an organization to support patient advocates in low- and middle-resource countries, enabling them to participate in addressing the burden of breast and cervical cancers in their regions. She is an adjunct professor in the University of Washington’s Department of Global Health and serves as an advisory council member for the Uganda Cancer Institute’s Adult Hematology/Oncology Fellowship Training Program and as Co-Chair of the ASCO Resource-Stratified Guideline Advisory Group. She is also on the editorial board of the European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO)/ASCO Global Curriculum in Medical Oncology. In these roles, she has collaborated frequently with Ministries of Health and the World Health Organization.

As an Executive Officer of breast and lung cancer for SWOG, a global cancer research community funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), Gralow has considerable experience in developing and conducting large, national cancer clinical trials; strategic planning; training of young investigators; and partnering with the NCI and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). She has served on the editorial board of multiple oncology journals, including the *Journal of Bone Oncology*, *Breast Diseases*, and *The Breast Journal*, and as an editor for ASCO’s patient website, Cancer.Net.

Gralow has been deeply involved in many cancer-related nonprofit organizations both in the U.S. and internationally, serving on the National Scientific Advisory Council of Susan G. Komen for the Cure; the Medical Advisory Board of Global Focus on Cancer; and the Board of Directors of the Pink Oak Cancer Trust, a cancer treatment fund in Nigeria, and at the Peace Island Medical Center, a 10-bed rural access medical center on San Juan Island, Washington, among others.

Grant Advances Research for Arsenic-Induced Lung Cancer

Donna D. Zhang, PhD, a University of Arizona Health Sciences researcher, has been awarded an 8-year, \$7.3 million federal grant to advance her 2 decades of research to determine how a family of proteins can be harnessed to prevent or treat arsenic-induced lung cancer and type 2 diabetes. The funding comes from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.



DONNA D.
ZHANG, PHD

Arsenic is a natural metalloid found in soil and is considered one of the most significant contaminants in drinking water globally when ingested at unsafe levels. It is present in almost all groundwater sources in Arizona, particularly in rural areas. Combined with occupational exposures, such as mining, more than 160 million people worldwide have been exposed to potentially unsafe levels of arsenic.

Zhang holds the Musil Family Endowed Chair in Drug Discovery at the UArizona College of Pharmacy, and is a research member at the UArizona Cancer Center and Associate Director of the UArizona Superfund Research Center. She will use the funding to further her efforts in untangling the complexities of a protein that could provide the key to treat diseases such as lung cancer that are triggered by injury and inflammation. Her research focuses on nuclear factor erythroid-2-related factor 2 (NRF2).

Zhang began studying NRF2 in 2000 as Research Assistant Professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia and has continued her work since joining UArizona Health Sciences in 2005.

“Arsenic contamination is a major global health issue, and Dr. Zhang’s research is poised to have a significant impact on improving the health of people in Arizona, across the country and throughout the world,” said University of Arizona President Robert C. Robbins, MD. “I look forward to following Dr. Zhang and her team’s continued progress toward improving treatments and developing potential cures for arsenic-induced diseases.”

Zhang underscored her focus on lung-related arsenic exposures. “Three types of cancer primarily are induced by exposure to arsenic:

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lung, skin, and bladder,” she said. “This project will focus on lung cancer, and our goal is to identify new pharmaceuticals to prevent or treat adverse health effects resulting from arsenic exposure.”

Zhang’s past research has uncovered both positive and negative effects of NRF2, a protein that plays a critical role in protecting healthy cells because of its ability to control how certain genes are expressed in response to stressors. These genes help protect the cell from damage that can lead to cancer progression and resistance to therapy. NRF2 has been a therapeutic target for chemoprevention drugs to help slow—or stop—the spread of cancer and other diseases.

Zhang also has uncovered what she calls a “dark side” to NRF2. Although NRF2 has the positive benefit of protecting healthy cells, it also can protect cancer cells. This occurs when NRF2 is activated constantly, meaning it is not being properly regulated. The result of this “hyperactivation” can lead to cancer growth, spread and resistance to therapy. It also can promote a pro-diabetic shift in metabolism, which can lead to type 2 diabetes.

“We are trying to better understand how arsenic disrupts the NRF2-mediated balance, resulting in lung cancer and type 2 diabetes,” Zhang said. “We want to rationally target NRF2 with a rigorous, multitiered approach to generate legitimate therapeutic options to mitigate these diseases.”

Researchers Earns Team Science Award for Work With World-Renowned Immunologist

Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center Deputy Director **Kunle Odunsi, MD, PhD, FRCOG, FACOG** received recognition in honor of his work with the “lab family” of the late and well-known immunologist, **Lloyd J. Old, MD**. At this year’s annual meeting, the Society for the Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC) presented its 2020 SITC Team Science Award to Odunsi and a number of fellow scientists who worked alongside Old.



KUNLE ODUNSI,
MD, PHD,
FRCOG, FACOG

Internationally recognized as one of the founders of the field of modern tumor immunology, Old was Director of the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research and held a long-standing appointment at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. He passed away in 2011, leaving along a legacy of mentoring hundreds of researchers, including Odunsi.



LLOYD J. OLD,
MD

Odunsi worked closely with Old during his tenure as United States Director of the Cancer Vaccine Collaborative (CVC) from 2005 to 2011, a joint venture between the Cancer Research Institute and the Ludwig Institute. Old established the CVC in 2001—a coordinated network that would design and run early-phase trials of therapeutic vaccines for the treatment of cancer. The organization’s continued goal is to not only look at human immune system response but also improve cancer outcomes.

“I am happy to have had spent time collaborating and learning alongside Dr. Old,” said Odunsi. “This award represents not just me, but countless young minds and researchers who have had the same privilege of knowing Dr. Old as well. His legacy continues to shine through with our groundbreaking work in immunotherapy today.”

Five MD Anderson Researchers Elected AAAS Fellows

In recognition of their achievements in advancing cancer research, five faculty members from The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center have been named fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). AAAS Fellows are elected by their peers, a tradition that began in 1874, in honor of their invaluable contributions to science and technology. MD Anderson’s faculty now includes 49 AAAS Fellows.

“Selection as AAAS Fellows highlights these scientists’ outstanding effort and innovation within their cancer research specialties,” said Peter WT Pisters, MD, President of MD Anderson. “This year’s fellows from MD Anderson exemplify our ongoing commitment to advancements in cancer biology, diagnosis, and treatment.”

MD Anderson’s newly elected AAAS Fellows include the following individuals:

- **Swathi Arur, PhD**, Associate Professor of Genetics, for discovery of Dicer1 phosphorylation by RAS/ERK signaling in *Caenorhabditis elegans* and implications for human fertility and cancer metastasis.



SWATHI ARUR,
PHD

- **George Calin, MD, PhD**, Professor of Experimental Therapeutics and Translational Molecular Pathology, for his landmark discovery linking human diseases and microRNAs (miRNAs), specifically downregulation of miRNAs in patients with leukemias, and for pioneering the concept of miRNAs involvement in neurogenesis.



GEORGE CALIN,
MD, PHD

- **Han Liang, PhD**, Professor of Bioinformatics and Computational Biology, for his pioneering integrative analysis of cancer genomic data and development of related bioinformatic tools to improve delivery of precision cancer medicine.



HAN LIANG, PHD

- **Sendurai Mani, PhD**, Professor of Translational Molecular Pathology, for demonstrating that cancer can make its own cancer stem cells and promote plasticity, resulting in metastasis and chemoresistance by activating latent embryonic epithelial-mesenchymal transition.



SENDURAI MANI,
PHD

- **Nicholas Navin, PhD**, Associate Professor of Genetics, for seminal contributions to understanding clonal evolution in breast cancer, and for inventing the first single-cell DNA sequencing methods, establishing the field of single-cell genomics.



NICHOLAS
NAVIN, PHD

The 489 newly elected AAAS Fellows were chosen this year due to their scientifically or socially distinguished efforts to advance science or its applications. The honor recognizes diverse accomplishments, including pioneering research, leading within a given field, teaching and mentoring, fostering collaborations, and advancing public understanding of science.

MYLUNG Study Aims to Advance Precision Medicine for Metastatic NSCLC

McKesson has joined together with life sciences companies, oncology providers, and patient advocacy groups in a unique collaborative effort, titled MYLUNG, to advance precision medicine options for non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) patients who are being treated in the community. NSCLC is the most common type of lung cancer according to the American Cancer Society, accounting for about 84 percent of lung cancer cases.

The MYLUNG consortium, or “Molecularly Informed Lung Cancer Treatment in a Community Cancer Network: A Pragmatic Consortium,” will observe up to 12,000 community-based, metastatic NSCLC patients over a 5-year period in one of the first broad, collaborative, research endeavors in lung cancer. In particular, MYLUNG aims to deepen understanding of molecular testing barriers to improve care for lung cancer patients, including those with mutations who may benefit from receiving precision medicine, the practice of leveraging targeted therapies across the continuum of care, as well as expand the opportunity for patients to participate in clinical trials.



ROBERT L.
COLEMAN, MD,
FACOG, FACS

“Many patients are not receiving the molecular testing they need to initiate targeted therapy early in their cancer care journey due to long timeframes, lack of coverage or another factor. This testing is critical to determine the patient’s cancer at a molecular level, so oncologists can create a more targeted and precise treatment plan,” said **Robert L. Coleman, MD, FACOG, FACS**, Chief Scientific Officer, US Oncology Research. “In order to fulfill the promise of precision medicine for NSCLC patients, we need a fuller understanding of the barriers, chal-

lenges, risks and opportunities around molecularly guided therapies. MYLUNG will draw insights from these datasets that can lead to better therapy for patients in a timelier manner.”

Lung cancer treatment is becoming increasingly personalized to include targeted therapies into earlier stages of disease. To support this, MYLUNG provides the framework to conduct research studies that will help define best practices for providers, as well as provide insights for life sciences companies seeking to quickly deliver potentially life-saving treatments to the patients who need them.

MYLUNG will consist of three protocols over a 5-year period:

- Protocol 1 retrospectively reviews real-world data from Ontario’s iKnowMedSM electronic health records of about 3,500 patients treated by providers in The US Oncology Network to understand baseline data on molecular testing across practices and identify historical barriers to testing and precision medicine in community practice.

- Protocol 2, enrolling about 1,000 patients from approximately 10 practices, will monitor the real-world patient journey from presentation through their first line of cancer therapy, focusing on how diagnostic biomarker information is obtained, utilized and operationalized in decision-making. Patients are currently being enrolled into Protocol 2.

- Protocol 3 will serve as a platform upon which prospectively assessed interventional strategies in patient-engagement algorithms will be conducted. Up to 7,500 patients from approximately 20 participating practices will be recruited over a five-year period. The individual clinical trials will integrate findings from the previous protocols and explore new processes and associated outcomes to help providers make the best treatment recommendations based on the data available and improve access to testing and appropriate therapies for NSCLC patients.

MYLUNG is poised to support meaningful progress and innovation in care delivery and potentially touch and improve thousands of lives. **Makenzi Evangelist, MD**, physician lead for the pragmatic study and oncologist with New York Oncology Hematology, a practice in The Network, said, “During the study and after, we hope that the interventions and our understanding of NSCLC improve, and we see increased testing and appropriate use of targeted therapies—all of which we hope will improve cancer care and patient outcomes.”



MAKENZI
EVANGELIST, MD

SU2C Head & Neck Cancer Ideas Lab

Stand Up To Cancer invites applications for participation in an Ideas Lab to establish the SU2C Head and Neck Cancer Research Team. The Research Team will bring new approaches to treating head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (HNSCC) cancer into the clinical setting, with a focus on HPV-related and Fanconi anemia (FA)-related cancers. Individuals with FA who survive into adulthood have a nearly 100 percent risk of mucosal squamous cell carcinomas, most commonly of the oral cavity.

The only safe treatment option to date is surgical resection, which is often not curative. Investigators across disciplines, including oncology, biology, engineering, chemistry, physics, or other areas are encouraged to apply to bring their expertise to bear against HNSCC and its association with HPV and defects in the FA pathway. Proposed ideas should be based on perceived opportunities for success as well as high-priority areas reflecting critical patient needs.

Stand Up To Cancer is committed to lowering the barriers of access to new treatments to all cancer patients and to expanding diversity with the inclusion of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic minority populations into clinical trials that we fund. As such, the research team will develop precision medical treatment and intervention solutions to serve diverse patient populations through clinical trials and research studies that have developed successful strategies, measurable outcomes, and robust outreach plans to feasibly and effectively include these populations into these studies. The Research Team aims, milestones, and deliverables will be developed by the Ideas Lab participants and clearly stated in their proposals.

The scope of work presented in the selected proposal will serve as the foundation for ongoing scientific review. It is anticipated that goals stated in the proposal will be achieved during the 3-year grant program. The funding available for the program is up to \$3,250,000. The deadline to apply is **March 22, 2021**. For more information go to <https://bit.ly/3aksAYx>. **OT**

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