News Release

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Grant Facilitates Cancer Research Collaboration in Maine, Improves Access to Research Tools

Cancer researchers will have easier access to biological samples used to conduct leading-edge research that may lead to new cancer treatments thanks to a Maine Cancer Foundation grant that will enhance collaboration between Maine Medical Center Research Institute (MMCRI) and Eastern Maine Medical Center (EMMC) Cancer Care. Each organization will receive $200,000 to improve their biorepositories (also known as Biobanks), which are programs that distribute biospecimens (patient tissue samples) to researchers. These awards also fund a new web portal that streamlines the process researchers use to request and acquire samples.

"A big challenge in medical research is to expand capacity without duplicating effort," said Tara Hill, Executive Director, Maine Cancer Foundation. "By providing these grant awards, the biorepositories at both EMMC Cancer Care and MMCRI will be able to improve their service to cancer researchers, and focus on getting the right biospecimen samples to the right people as quickly as possible. That's progress."

Earlier in 2015, MCF received separate proposals from Maine's two largest hospitals to expand their biorepositories. MCF awarded a grant to each organization to support development of a collaborative model that draws on the unique strengths of each biorepository, and ultimately boosts support to Maine-based cancer researchers.

The new web portal provides access to the specimens at both biorepositories, consultation services to researchers, and a streamlined ordering process. The grants fund improvements to each biorepository including equipment upgrades, software for inventory management, and additional staffing to support the activities of the web portal.

"A new era has begun in cancer research" said Jens Rueter, MD, Medical Director, EMMC BioBank and the organization's Principal Investigator for the grant. "We can now use cancerous tissue to conduct groundbreaking research, and because of the promise this type of research holds, EMMC Cancer Care's program has grown rapidly and now collects blood and bone marrow samples. With this grant, we will be able to expand the network of researchers we work with and ensure our biorepository has a diverse collection of samples from across the state. Also, it is exciting that we are participating in building a better and collaborative research infrastructure for cancer research in Maine. Collaborations are critical for the success of research projects, especially in times of decreasing funding opportunities."

The MMC BioBank has been providing solid tissue biospecimens for cancer research both locally and nationally for over 10 years.

"Emerging technologies, such as the ability to isolate and characterize tumor cells in blood, have led to an increased need for liquid biospecimens in addition to solid tissue samples for cancer research," said Anne Breggia, Ph.D., Director of the MMC BioBank and the organization's Principal Investigator for the grant. "The MCF grant enables the MMC Biorepository to put the necessary infrastructure in place to better collect liquid samples

such as blood, bone marrow, and body fluids. This will both help advance scientific discoveries and provide the opportunity for more patients in our region to donate critically needed samples for research, and thus make important contributions to the fight against cancer."

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