

British Columbia Cancer Agency

Centre for Lymphoid Cancer *Newsletter*

Lymphoma ♦ Leukemia ♦ Myeloma

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dedicated to curing the lymphoid cancers

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- AnGELyC Project
- Lymphoid Cancer Education Day May 25, 2012

Analysis of Genomes to Eliminate Lymphoid Cancer

AnGELyC Project January Update

The AnGELyC project (**A**nalysis of **G**enomes to **E**liminate **L**ymphoid **C**ancer) was conceived in late 2010 to provide a core research focus for the researchers in the BC Cancer Agency Centre for Lymphoid Cancer. The BC Cancer Foundation saw the appeal such a project can have and worked with us in the CLC to find funding. The Foundation chose the AnGELyC project as a showpiece for the annual BC Cancer Foundation gala celebration in October 2010 and raised \$2,100,000 to support it. The project had a very busy first year during 2011. With this solid beginning accomplished I thought the readers of the CLC Newsletter would like to here about some of the efforts of our research group. I hope to include occasional updates of what is happening within the AnGELyC project in future issues of the CLC Newsletter.

In 2011 we were able to build on previously initiated projects to carry on with several major research efforts. With this update I would like to describe some work led by Dr Christian Steidl and announce the great news that Christian has joined our group as a lead investigator. His work is being noticed around the world and having him on board is a major boost for our program.

Two types of related lymphoid cancers often present in young patients with large tumors in the chest: Hodgkin lymphoma and primary mediastinal large B cell lymphoma. Together these lymphomas affect about 100 new patients each year in British Columbia. They have become a major focus of Christian's research.

Primary mediastinal lymphoma has defied molecular characterization in the past and was not known to be commonly associated with any specific genetic abnormality. Christian's research group was able to prove that almost 40% of cases of this lymphoma have a specific recurrent gene fusion. This means that these patients' tumors have translocated (moved) a particular gene (scientific name: transactivator CIITA) from its normal location on chromosome 16 to a new chromosome where it is not properly regulated. The net effect is that the tumor cells turn off the immune response the patient's normal immune system might use to fight the cancer. Christian was able to show that patients with this CIITA translocation have a poorer response to chemotherapy and are more likely to have a relapse of their lymphoma. This is exciting because there are already medications being tested that might be able to undue this blockage of the normal immune response. In addition, Christian also found this CIITA translocation in some cases of Hodgkin lymphoma and other lymphomas indicating once again that when something important is found in one lymphoma it is often also important for other cancers.

Christian described his exciting discovery of the CIITA translocation in the prestigious journal *Nature* and there has been an immediate response from scientists around the world. We were delighted that even in the midst of all this international notice we were able to recruit Christian to stay at BCCA and continue his research focused on lymphoid cancer. Partial support of his research from funds donated to the

AnGELyC project was influential in persuading Christian that BC is the place to be to make exciting new discoveries in lymphoma. This type of start up funding is crucial for young scientists like Christian because it provides the launching pad for him to apply for and win additional independent funding from foundations and governments. The timing of the BC Cancer Foundation 2010 gala and the donation of funds for the AnGELyC project was perfect, coming just when we needed the support to carry on with this important recruitment.

Joseph M Connors, MD
Clinical Director, BCCA Center for Lymphoid
Cancer

Lymphoid Cancer Education Day 25 May 2012

On Friday May 25, 2012 we anticipate that more than 200 patients, family members and friends interested in the lymphoid cancers will gather at the Jewish Community Center at the corner of 41st and Oak (950 West 41st Ave) for the annual BCCA – CLC Lymphoid Cancer Education Day. Presentations will given by specialists and researchers from the BC Cancer Agency, the BC Cancer Research Center and the BCCA Genome Sciences Center addressing a wide variety of topics including basic biology of lymphoid cancers, causes and inheritance of lymphoid cancers, new treatments and new diagnostic tests for lymphoid cancers and patient advocacy for research and health care funding for lymphoid cancers.

Breakout groups focused on Hodgkin lymphoma, indolent lymphoma, aggressive lymphoma and myeloma will allow participants to ask specific questions and to have an informal open discussion with a lymphoid cancer specialist or researcher. Additional sessions focused on coping with the impact of lymphoid cancer, supportive measures and other topics of general interest to patients, family members and friends will round out the program.

Strongly positive feedback has been provided by participants of these Education Days in the past and we hope they will continue to be helpful and informative. The opportunity to network with

others affected by lymphoid cancers and to see the array of informational materials from the Centre for Lymphoid Cancer, the Lymphoma Foundation Canada and the Leukemia Lymphoma Society are particularly valuable sources of information. We will continue to offer a Lymphoid Cancer Education Day annually and welcome input from past and future participants to make it most valuable for all.

If you are interested in attending the Lymphoid Cancer Education Day check the details at <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/ABCCA/comingevents/default>. Seating is limited and the event usually fills up so be sure to register by phoning 604-877-6000 extension 672196 (outside Vancouver call 1-800-663-3333 extension 672196).

Newsletter News

Publication of this Newsletter has only been intermittent in the past; however, we hope to be able to increase its frequency in the future. Its value can be enhanced if we hear from you, the readers, with suggestions for future content. Comments or suggestions can be sent to clc@bccancer.bc.ca. We will not be able to acknowledge each one but we do promise to read them all and use them as we choose future topics for the Newsletter.

If you hear of others who would like to receive future copies of this Newsletter have them send their email address to clc@bccancer.bc.ca.

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