

METABOLISM, ENDOCRINOLOGY AND DIABETES (MEND)

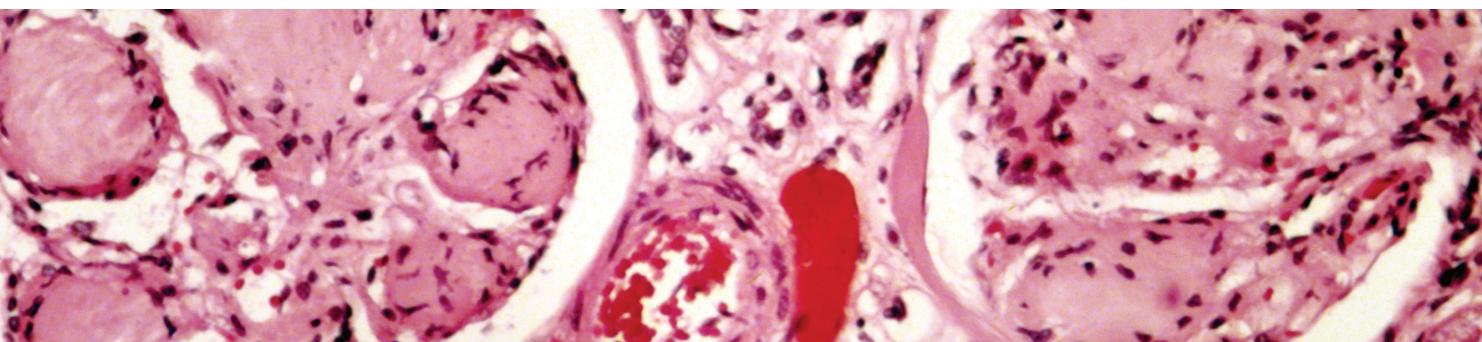
New Endocrine Oncology Destination Program: Cutting-Edge Care, Progressive Research

Only about 600 cases of adrenal cancer are diagnosed each year in the United States. These cancers are so uncommon that many practicing doctors have never seen a single case, and so a large number of patients are referred for specialized care at the University of Michigan Health System for specialized. The Comprehensive Cancer Center's Endocrine Oncology Destination Program makes it even easier now for these patients to receive care from several physicians at one time and in one place. With 16 faculty members in six specialties, the Endocrine Oncology Destination Program is one of the only fully integrated, interdisciplinary clinics for thyroid and adrenal cancer patients in the world.

"Those seeking care for rare cancer have very few options," says **Gary Hammer, MD, PhD** (right), the program's director and the Millie Schembechler Professor of Adrenal Cancer. "It's our duty to make ourselves available to doctors and

patients around the country so they know they can turn to someone who knows about their particular cancer."

The Endocrine Oncology Destination Program is part of a U-M Health System initiative to provide service-oriented and accessible interdisciplinary care. "Multidisciplinary care is increasingly recognized as being critical in treating cancer, particularly rare types such as adrenal cancer. Fortunately, the Endocrine Oncology Program, which has been in existence since 2005, had already been working this way," says Dr. Hammer.



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Under his leadership, the program's faculty and staff take the same collaborative approach to diagnosing and treating adrenal cancer as they do for more prevalent types. Patients benefit by having specialists from many disciplines – surgery, oncology, endocrinology, social work and others – work closely together. Patients also have access to state-of-the-art conventional and investigational therapies.

Science That Makes a Difference

Outstanding clinical care is possible "because we're also actively engaged in progressive research here," says Dr. Hammer. "We have a rich tradition of thyroid and adrenal work, including having pioneered novel imaging techniques to characterize endocrine tumors."

Dr. Hammer and colleagues are now working to understand the molecular genetics of adrenal and thyroid cancers, respectively, to develop new targeted therapies. His group's current

research focus is the use of insulin-like growth factor (IGF) inhibitors. Previous research, including work done at U-M, has shown that the IGF pathway is intimately involved in adrenal cancer development.

"Because there are drugs that block this pathway, we've been able to shepherd research through pre-clinical and early clinical studies," explains Hammer. National and international clinical trials utilizing these targeted therapies have recently been launched. "This is a major step forward in the treatment of a rare cancer," he adds.

The National Institutes of Health recently awarded Dr. Hammer a \$1.8 million grant to look more deeply into the molecular pathways of adrenal cancer cells in order to better understand their molecular and genetic defects. The thyroid and adrenal research groups hope to isolate thyroid and adrenal cancer stem cells to identify the panel of genetic mutations that contribute to these diseases.

New Clinic Provides Full-Spectrum Diabetes Care

Some 24 million Americans currently live with diabetes, and unfortunately that figure will only rise as obesity rates climb and our population ages. Responding to the growing need for coordinated outpatient care, the Metabolism Endocrinology & Diabetes (MEND) division opened a new clinic in June 2009. The new facility provides a myriad of services for the comprehensive care of adults with diabetes as well as treatment of osteoporosis, thyroid disorders and other hormone-related conditions.

"By bringing our resources together to a single, much larger place we're able to offer better care and to accommodate the growing need for our expertise, which we know will only increase with time," says Associate Professor **Craig Jaffe, MD**, the clinic's director.

The new 23,000-square-foot facility located at Domino's Farms replaces two smaller clinics. The new space offers ample, free, on-site parking and was designed for abundant natural lighting and easier mobility for patients. The facility includes 25 exam rooms, four procedure rooms and space for individual or group patient education classes. Physicians now can provide expanded services to more patients, including specialized procedures such as ultrasound-guided fine-needle biopsies and dynamic tests of hormone levels.

Adults with diabetes face a host of potential complications, including serious foot problems and retinal damage that can lead to blindness. "Our expanded podiatry services allow our diabetes patients to receive expert foot care right here. We've increased the number of podiatry examination rooms and have added outpatient specialized procedure rooms," says Dr. Jaffe (right). These developments are necessary because the frequency of foot disease in this population is so high.

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Dr. Hammer envisions a future that includes more trials associated with ongoing U-M research. "I would like to see every patient who visits the program placed into a clinical trial," he says. The endocrine oncology team also plans to continue work that began nearly eight years ago on a robust tissue bank and database that catalogs the clinical characteristics of adrenal cancer patients treated at U-M. The goal is to link the database to other databases in Europe, creating an international adrenal cancer databank. "These types of successful collaborations will propel our adrenal and thyroid disease research and treatments further forward," he says.

Funding Future Research

Securing funding for research into rare cancers and treatments is difficult. In the case of adrenal cancer, funding frequently comes from impassioned people who have been affected by the disease. For instance, Garry Betty, former chief executive of EarthLink who succumbed to adrenal

cancer in 2007, created a foundation to support progressive research. The Garry Betty Scholars Program pays for international researchers to come to U-M for training in adrenal cancer research.

When Millie Schembechler, the wife of former U-M football coach Bo Schembechler, died of adrenal cancer, he endowed a professorship in her name, a professorship that Dr. Hammer now holds. His efforts raised millions of dollars to support research. "Bo's support also fostered a growing awareness that really helped galvanize our Endocrine Oncology Program," says Dr. Hammer.

Hammer hopes the destination program can continue to add faculty, explore the biology underlying endocrine cancers, translate scientific discoveries into better care and therapeutic options, and have those advances themselves inform future research. "That back-and-forth," says Hammer, "is really how you make a difference."

The new clinic also is fully equipped to detect retinal disease in its early stages, which is critical to staving off further damage and blindness. Patients who are at risk for retinal disease from diabetes mellitus will be able to have their retinas scanned, and the digital images read by collaborating ophthalmologists in the Kellogg Eye Center. This procedure will be convenient for patients and help identify individuals having early, asymptomatic diabetic retinal disease.

Other clinical activities focusing on education and preventive care also are growing. For example, the clinic's Pre-Conception Pregnancy Planning Program is expanding. The program, run by Assistant Professor **Jennifer Wyckoff, MD**, provides individualized instruction and diabetes care to help patients optimize their blood sugar levels prior to pregnancy. The clinic's certified diabetes educators and nutritionists now have increased space to better provide chronic diabetes management services, including individual counseling and group classes, through the Diabetes Self-Management Education Program.

Not surprisingly, patients, faculty and staff have responded positively to the new space, enhanced services and extended hours. "The new clinic not only improves our efficiency and patient flow; it lets us look at growing new clinical and research programs," says Dr. Jaffe. "We're actively investigating expanding research programs in clinical obesity and osteoporosis as well as hiring new faculty and forging more collaborations with other departments," he adds. "It's very exciting – the new space will allow us to pursue all of these opportunities."

