

MCW Cancer Center
Director's Update, January 2014
2014 New Year's Message

Dear colleagues, friends, and community,

I wish you a happy and healthy new year, and look forward to another year of hard work, discovery and innovation at the MCW Cancer Center. I would like to take a moment to look back on the accomplishments of 2013 and share some of our vision for the coming year.



Most importantly, 2013 brought the Cancer Center closer toward NCI designation, and we completed several key milestones, [including a visit to the NCI with Cancer Center and MCW leadership.](#)

NCI designation is a key goal, not only for the Cancer Center, but also for MCW and our entire community, particularly the underserved who cannot access centers in Madison or Chicago. Designation attracts renowned faculty and clinicians for our patients, gives local patients unique opportunities to access clinical research and new treatments, and provides halo NCI funding that accelerates cancer research, including community engagement and disparities research. It's important that we help our faculty, staff, and community members understand and rally around designation, NCI funding and research resources, and understand that these initiatives are important to everyone who cares about cancer and cancer research.

One important function of the MCW Cancer Center is to award seed grants to its members, with the ultimate goal of advancing research and moving more individuals toward peer-reviewed, and particularly, NCI funding. In 2013, [we saw an increase in peer-reviewed research grants](#) to our members. [This year also saw the retirement of Dr. Robert Truitt,](#) Cancer Center Associate Director of Research Resources, who was instrumental in developing the Cancer Center seed grant program and portfolio, and in reviewing and awarding cancer-related seed grants. His work with the Cancer Center helped develop new projects, young investigators, and new science in the prevention, causes, detection, and treatment of cancer.

Moving forward in 2014, the Cancer Center has instituted new seed grant processes and launched two new standing review committees to review all Cancer Center seed grants. The Basic Science Seed Grant Review Committee is chaired by Dr. Ravi Misra, and the Clinical Research Seed Grant Review Committee is chaired by Dr. Bruce Campbell. Seed grant applications will be evaluated using the NIH scoring system and Review Committee members will consist of Cancer Center leadership, investigators who serve on NCI review sections, past and future seed grant awardees, and ad hoc members selected for their scientific expertise. Former seed grant awardees may be asked to serve on review committees in the spirit of "paying it forward" to support fellow cancer researchers and the Cancer Center. This new methodology will increase the potential and return on Cancer Center grants, and ensure that awards are distributed in a way that supports team science, translational science, and help members become NCI-funded researchers. It also ensures that seed grant awards are closely aligned with the Cancer Center strategic plan and goals, and will help the Cancer Center demonstrate the value of our seed grants by elevating the value of these awards in the eyes of our NCI reviewers and the academic community in general.

Another critical function of the Cancer Center is our centralized Clinical Trials Office (CTO). This integrated effort has resulted in a marked increase in all cancer clinical trial accrual, and particularly accrual in interventional cancer trials. Overall, enrollment in cancer clinical trials has doubled since 2010. Of course, accrual is only one way to measure success, and perhaps the most important event impacting clinical cancer research at MCW was the October 2013 opening of the [Nicolas Family Foundation Translational Research Unit \(TRU\).](#) The TRU space is devoted to early-phase investigator-initiated cancer research trials, one of only a few in the nation with the capability to conduct early-phase cancer clinical trials in dedicated space with experienced research staff. [In 2013 our pediatric clinical trials team continued its success, adding new staff and also increasing the number of trials and trial enrollment.](#) Throughout 2014 we will continue to integrate our adult and pediatric clinical trials by standardizing the SOPs, data, and reporting for all cancer trials at MCW.

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Throughout 2013, many different groups helped lead and direct the Cancer Center, bringing together important work to support cancer research, integrated clinical care, and engagement with our unique community. These groups include our External Scientific Advisory Board (ESAB), Internal Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB), Senior Leadership, Program Leaders, Cancer Center administration staff, the Task Force on Community Engagement, shared resource directors and staff, Cancer Center members, our new Faculty Research Committees, Scientific Safety Monitoring Committee, and Data Safety Monitoring Committee, and the Cancer Center Community Board that is directed by our development staff. Each of these groups achieved or supported major accomplishments in 2013.

For example, the Cancer Center Program Leadership made great strides this year in establishing regular research program events, including weekly seminar speakers, [monthly seminar series with nationally renowned cancer researchers](#), and full day annual research program retreats. Our Senior Leadership team was instrumental in supporting several key events including the [first annual cancer center-wide scientific research retreat](#), our first formal [visit to the NCI](#), and our second review by our External Scientific Advisory Board.

In 2014, we will continue these collaborative research events, including our annual scientific retreat on June 6, 2014, with key note speaker [Dafna Bar-Sagi, PhD, Senior Vice President and Vice Dean for Science, and the Chief Science Officer for the NYU Langone Medical Center.](#)

Another leadership accomplishment was the recruitment of several key cancer-focused faculty members, [including the appointment of Dr. Ellen Velie](#). Dr. Velie is a nationally renowned population sciences researcher in breast cancer disparities and the principal investigator on an NCI R01 studying breast cancer disparities in young African American women. Dr. Velie has been named the Joan A. Van Deuren Chair in Breast Cancer Research, and we are thrilled to welcome her to MCW and the Cancer Center.

Dr. Velie's recruitment is particularly exciting as the Cancer Center continues its focus on cancer community engagement, and particularly in addressing the alarming cancer disparities in Southeastern Wisconsin. In spring of 2013 we established the Cancer Center Task Force on Community Engagement (TFCE) and named Syed M. Ahmed, MD, MPH, DrPH, FAAFP, Senior Associate Dean for Community Engagement and Alonzo Walker, MD, Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Diversity as co-chairs of this group. With representatives throughout Milwaukee communities, non-profits and institutions, this group is helping us direct our efforts in Community-Based and Community-Engaged cancer projects, and [build on the success of Cancer Center members focused on this type of research.](#)

Finally, as we look forward in 2014, I wanted to highlight several upcoming events on the Cancer Center annual calendar, and hope that we see many of you at these important events.

- January 13-14, 2014, Cancer Center Administration Retreat with Beverly Ginsburg Cooper of Huron Consulting Group
- January 17, 2014, Call for abstracts, 2014 Cancer Center Scientific Retreat
- January 29, 2014: Cancer Center Seminar Series, Dr. Jennifer Griggs, *Cancer Care in the Obese: Advocating for the Vulnerable*
- February 14, 2014, Application deadline for Winter Cycle Seed Grants RFA
- For a full listing of Cancer Center events, [please visit our website calendar.](#)

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Again, I'd like to thank all of our members, leadership, and community for such a successful year and for your continued support and effort in 2014. Please let me know if you have any questions, ideas, or comments -- my door is always open.

My best to you and your families in the New Year.

-Ming

Ming You, MD, PhD
Cancer Center Director
Professor, Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology
Senior Associate Dean for Cancer Research, Education & Clinical Care
Joseph F. Heil Professor in Molecular Oncogenesis