Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah

For Immediate Release

Contact:
Linda Aagard
Public Affairs
Huntsman Cancer Institute
801-587-7639
Linda.aagard@hci.utah.edu

HCI Awarded $12,000,000 to Study Colon Cancer

SALT LAKE CITY— The National Cancer Institute has awarded a $12.2 million grant to Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) at the University of Utah to identify and test new ways to prevent, detect, and treat colon cancer. Researchers involved in the five-year project will focus on the genetics, cell biology, and development of colon cancer and the adenomatous polyp, which is the initial growth that leads to colon cancer. The project is a competitive renewal of a grant awarded in 2003. The new studies are based on promising results obtained from the previous grant.

Adenomatous polyposis coli (APC) is a gene that prevents tumors from forming. It mutates in up to 85% of colorectal cancers and adenomatous polyps. Researchers believe an improved understanding of this gene could result in a more targeted approach to the diagnosis of colon cancer. It could also lead to the development of drugs to prevent and treat colorectal polyps and cancer in general. One aspect of the study will involve chemotherapy believed to prevent colon cancer in a group of patients that have inherited APC mutations. The work done in this group can then be applied to the general population, as the large majority of colon cancers have acquired APC mutations.
The University of Utah has a long, successful history of research involving the APC gene. In 1987, a group of U of U researchers discovered the chromosomal location of this gene in patients with inherited APC mutations. Soon after, the researchers identified the sequence of the gene and the mutations responsible for the syndrome. Because of research, genetic testing is now available to identify persons with the inherited syndrome.

Randall Burt, M.D., a member of the original research team that discovered the APC gene and now HCI Senior Director or Prevention and Outreach, and David Jones, Ph.D., HCI Senior Director of Early Translational Research, will lead a research team that includes Melinda Angus-Hill, Ph.D., Mario Capecchi, Ph.D., Diana Stafforini, Ph.D., and Matthew Topham, M.D. “This study examines both clinical and basic research aspects of colon cancer,” says Burt. “The findings may well affect prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for those predisposed to, or with, this disease.”

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