



Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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Cancer symposium aims to unify Cornell researchers

🐾 Friday, March 30, 2018 - 12:29pm

Cornell University will hold the first Annual Cancer Research Symposium to showcase diverse and groundbreaking cancer research on campus and to better integrate investigators from departments and colleges across the Ithaca campus with Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City.

The symposium will be held at the College of Veterinary Medicine April 5-6. It will feature presentations by researchers who represent the breadth of cancer research and activities on Cornell's Ithaca campus. These generally fall under five key areas: animal models, cancer cell biology, physical sciences and engineering, drug development and chemical biology, and community engagement between young researchers and cancer patients.

Key people from Weill Cornell Medicine were invited to attend the symposium, including Lewis Cantley, the Meyer Director of the Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Center. Cantley will be part of a panel discussion moderated by Nobel Prize winner Harold Varmus, the Lewis Thomas University Professor of Medicine and a member of the Meyer Cancer Center at Weill Cornell Medicine. The panel will explore the state of cancer research at Cornell and strategies to more effectively link researchers in Ithaca and at Weill Cornell Medicine. Currently, many Ithaca-based researchers are members of the Meyer Cancer Center.

Round table discussions among Ithaca-campus groups will identify potential collaborations that could lead to the development of multi-investigator research and training grants.

"There is a lot of amazing cancer research going on at Cornell, but it's spread across different colleges, departments and areas of expertise," said Claudia Fischbach, associate professor of biomedical engineering and director of the Cornell Center on the Physics of Cancer Metabolism. Fischbach is one of the symposium organizers, along with Robert Weiss, professor of molecular genetics, and Richard Cerione, the Goldwin Smith Professor of Pharmacology and Chemical Biology.

"The primary goal [of the event] is to bring the Ithaca cancer community together, to give people a better idea of the scope of the research," Weiss said. "Right now, there is no centralized structure."

The hope is that such meetings will help create a campuswide identity around cancer research.

"We hope that our efforts take off," Cerione said. "It would be very complementary and beneficial to the efforts at Weill Cornell Medicine. There are things going on here that aren't going on there."

One strength at Cornell in Ithaca is the partnership between the Cornell cancer research community and Ithaca's Cancer Resource Center; the collaboration connects Cornell trainees (graduate students and postdoctoral associates) who research cancer with patients and survivors in the community. While patients have opportunities to ask questions about cancer research and treatments, trainees learn to communicate and present their work to the public. The program also helps trainees tailor their research to the public's needs.

"We are not aware of any other program that does this," said Weiss, who is a leader on the Cornell side of the program, which started with a curriculum development grant from the Office of Engaged Initiatives.

Other strengths include the development of a wide variety of genetically engineered mouse models of cancer; cancer cell biology and the roles of signaling, genomics and stem cells; imaging approaches such as Cornell dots, nanoparticles developed for cancer detection; biomedical engineering to create better systems to deliver drugs to tumor cells and tumor models to better understand how cancer cells behave in the body; and chemical biology and drug development.

Registration for the event is closed.

By Krishna Ramanujan

This story originally appeared in the Cornell Chronicle.