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ASTRO to award \$675,000 in junior faculty research grants

Seven researchers selected to receive critical funding for radiation oncology-specific studies

Fairfax, Va., Aug. 22, 2013 – The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) has selected seven (7) leading researchers who will receive a total of \$675,000 in awards and grants to advance radiation oncology research. The **Junior Faculty Career Research Training Awards**, the **ASTRO Resident/Fellows in Radiation Oncology Research Seed Grants** and the **ASTRO/Radiation Oncology Institute (ROI) Comparative Effectiveness Research Awards** will fund studies in radiation and cancer biology, radiation physics, translational research, outcomes/health services research and comparative effectiveness research within radiation oncology. Recipients will be recognized at ASTRO's 55th Annual Meeting, September 22-25, 2013, at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta.

"Advances in radiation oncology to improve cancer care and treatment for patients are the direct result of high-quality research," said ASTRO Chairman Michael L. Steinberg, MD, FASTRO. "ASTRO is proud to foster each of these outstanding researchers in their professional growth and to support their efforts to advance cancer care, particularly as it relates to radiation oncology."

The **Junior Faculty Career Research Training Award** provides \$100,000 annually for two years to two winners (\$200,000 to each recipient) to support the careers of promising junior faculty by offering them the opportunity for dedicated time to work on research projects in radiation oncology, biology, physics or outcomes/health services. Recipients must be board-eligible physicians, physicists in radiation oncology or radiobiologists within the first three years of their junior faculty appointment.

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The two (2) 2013 Junior Faculty Research Training Grant awardees are:

- Joseph Mancias, MD, PhD, of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. Dr. Mancias is evaluating the use of autophagy inhibition to make pancreatic cancer cells more susceptible to radiation therapy (radiosensitization). Recent research has shown autophagy, a normal physiological process that contributes to cell destruction, is critical in the growth of pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma.
- Terence Williams, MD, PhD, of The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Dr. Williams is working on elucidating and targeting intrinsic KRAS mutant radioresistance with novel RAS targeted therapies. The goal of the research is to improve the effects of radiation by better characterizing DNA damage response pathways in KRAS mutant tumor cells, which can benefit patients with pancreatic adenocarcinoma, a disease that typically has a high rate of KRAS mutations.

The **ASTRO Resident/Fellows in Radiation Oncology Research Seed Grant** awards \$25,000 for one-year projects to residents and fellows who are planning to pursue careers focusing on basic science or clinical research in the radiation oncology sciences. The three (3) 2013 grant recipients are:

- Andrew Sharabi, MD, PhD, of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Dr. Sharabi is researching the effect of strategic radiation use combined with novel immunotherapy agents on improved clinical outcomes as a result of radiation-induced antigen-specific immune responses. Recent research has shown that focused radiation can stimulate an anti-tumor immune response at distant sites outside of the radiation field (Abscopal Effect).
- Gregory Gan, MD, PhD, of the University of Colorado Denver, Anschutz Medical Campus, in Aurora, Colo. Dr. Gan is examining the Hedgehog Pathway, which is involved in maintenance and regeneration of adult tissues, and radiation therapy resistance in head and neck cancer. His research examines whether the DNA damage response pathway effects GLI1 nuclear translocation following radiation therapy and whether Hedgehog Pathway inhibition of tumor stroma/microenvironment contributes to enhanced tumor control following radiation therapy in vivo.

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- Darrion Mitchell, MD, PhD, of the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City, Iowa. Dr. Mitchell is researching the use of epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition (EMT), which enables metastatic foci to develop resistance to radiation therapy and chemotherapy, as a therapeutic target in prostate cancer. This study will determine if inhibiting autophagy (cell function and metabolism) using chloroquine leads to radiosensitization of prostate cancer cells in the EMT-like state by increasing oxidative stress.

The first **ASTRO/ROI Comparative Effectiveness Research Award** provides \$50,000 annually for two years to two researchers (\$100,000 to each recipient) who will conduct comparative effectiveness research examining radiation oncology treatment. Awardees are board-certified or board-eligible physicians in radiation oncology at the time the award begins and are focused on academic radiation oncology. The two (2) 2013 recipients are:

- Timothy Showalter, MD, of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Va. Dr. Showalter is conducting individualized comparative effectiveness research for prostate cancer treatment to better inform patients faced with adjuvant radiation therapy decisions immediately following radical prostatectomy, which has a higher risk of recurrence.
- Karen Hoffman, MD, MHSc, MPH, of The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. Dr. Hoffman is researching the impact of radiotherapy practice structure on prostate cancer treatment costs and outcomes, comparing complications, cost of care and treatment patterns at integrated and traditional prostate cancer practices and clinics.

For more information about ASTRO-supported grants and awards, visit

www.astro.org/Research/Funding-Opportunities/ASTRO-Supported-Grants/Index.aspx.

ABOUT ASTRO

ASTRO is the premier radiation oncology society in the world, with more than 10,000 members who are physicians, nurses, biologist, physicists, radiation therapists, dosimetrists and other health care professionals

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that specialize in treating patients with radiation therapies. As the leading organization in radiation oncology, the Society is dedicated to improving patient care through professional education and training, support for clinical practice and health policy standards, advancement of science and research, and advocacy. ASTRO publishes two medical journals, International Journal of Radiation Oncology • Biology • Physics (www.redjournal.org) and Practical Radiation Oncology (www.practicalradonc.org); developed and maintains an extensive patient website, www.rtanswers.org; and created the Radiation Oncology Institute (www.roinstitute.org), a non-profit foundation to support research and education efforts around the world that enhance and confirm the critical role of radiation therapy in improving cancer treatment. To learn more about ASTRO, visit www.astro.org.

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