

momentum

SPRING 2009 | A NEWSLETTER FROM THE DAMON RUNYON CANCER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

What makes a great cancer researcher?

What does it mean for a scientist to win funding from the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation? Statistically, it is as hard to get a Damon Runyon Award as it is to get into Harvard. Awardees are chosen for their intellectual brilliance and innovative approaches, and given the financial freedom to pursue their novel ideas. Where does this lead them?

Here, we profile three Damon Runyon scientists at different stages in their careers. We asked them what they're working on now, what impact Damon Runyon has had on their research and what inspires them.



DIPALI G. SASHITAL, PHD
DAMON RUNYON
POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW
UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Dr. Sashital, age 30, was granted a Damon Runyon Fellowship in December 2007, continuing the Foundation's long tradition of funding the most promising

young scientists. She is one of 80 Damon Runyon Fellows currently funded at top universities across the US.

Revealing cancer's machinery

"DNA is the carrier of genetic information in all of our cells. To translate its information into action, DNA uses 'messenger' molecules, called RNA, which were previously thought to have a very limited role. However, it is now becoming clear that RNA has many functions, and understanding these is a focus of my work.

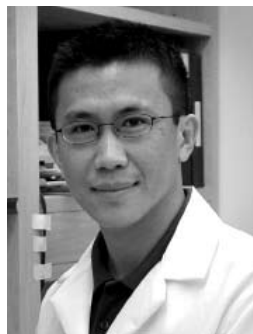
"When I was writing the grant application for the Fellowship, it caused me to think more about my research in terms of cancer biology. One of my long-term goals is to find out what role these RNAs play in human cancers, as there is some evidence that they (or elements linked to them) may function in the spread of the disease."

A young scientist's career

"Other people my age sometimes ask if I'm still a student – and in a way I am. The process to achieve independence is longer for scientists than it is for other professions. I've recently achieved my PhD and now I'm working as a postdoctoral Fellow. I would call it more of an apprenticeship. I won't have a 'real job' – my own independent lab – until I'm well into my 30s.

"It's interesting to compare my attitude towards work to those of my non-scientist friends. My sister, for instance, scolds me because I'm always in the lab. But I don't feel like it's work. Science is something I enjoy so much; it's so important to me. It just feels like... my life. Of course, I'm very lucky because my husband and I work in the same building!

"Obviously the Damon Runyon Fellowship is very prestigious. I think it will be extremely helpful going forward. It is also rewarding to be working on one of the most important things we can study, and to be doing something that may really help society. I hope my project will be impactful, that it will be illuminating."



HAI YAN, MD, PHD
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DUKE UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER

Dr. Yan was the Suzanne and Bob Wright Scholar from January 2005 to 2007. His lab is studying medulloblastoma and glioma, aggressive forms of brain cancer.

Dr. Yan and his colleagues have made significant discoveries that may enable patients to be treated more effectively. Two of their important findings, one in 2005 and the other in February 2009, help to clarify the genetic makeup of these brain cancer cells and illuminate potential avenues for targeted therapies.

The source of the problem

"We're now in the sixth year of studying the genetic basis of brain tumors, which are notoriously difficult to treat and cure. We've recently discovered* the most common, and perhaps the earliest, genetic changes in gliomas.

"This new discovery could provide pharmaceutical companies with a potential target to develop new drugs. In addition, using this information, doctors can develop a simple, cost-effective test to distinguish between glioma patients who will or won't respond to some treatments."

The high cost of cancer research

"Studying the genetics of cancer is very costly and complex. Ambitious studies require seed money, and gaining funding can be very difficult for investigators early in their careers. Without this initial funding, ideas cannot really begin to take shape.

"When I received Damon Runyon funding I was so grateful. It allowed me to set up the brain tumor oncogenomic program at Duke; to get the equipment, reagents and people I needed. The sequencing procedure of DNA costs \$5 each time, and we needed to do thousands and thousands of them to find the cancer gene mutations – to get one conclusive result."

Ongoing benefit

"Without Damon Runyon support, I cannot imagine; my career would probably have gone a very different way. People recognize the name, and the support set my research on the right track. It has helped my career tremendously."

*These findings were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in February 2009.



ELAINE V. FUCHS, PHD
REBECCA C. LANCEFIELD
PROFESSOR, THE
ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

Dr. Fuchs is recognized worldwide for revolutionizing the study of skin. Her lab of 20 researchers focuses on understanding skin stem cells and the causes of epidermal cancers.

Among her extensive achievements, Dr. Fuchs was named one of the Nation's Outstanding Scientists by the White House, awarded membership in the National Academy of Sciences and elected a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator. She was a Damon Runyon Fellow from '77-'79 and elected to the Foundation's Board of Directors in 2004.

A day in the life of a senior scientist

"A typical day starts with a trip to the gym. Then, over breakfast, I catch up on the news and do an early run-through of emails that have come in overnight from around the world. On arrival at my office, I focus on our lab's manuscripts in progress or review recent data with lab members.

In addition to these daily activities, I coordinate weekly and bi-monthly group meetings to share ideas, troubleshoot experimental hurdles, and discuss research accomplishments and recent literature. I also travel frequently to discuss my research with the national and international communities of scientists working in this field."

The Fellowship as a turning point

"I remember the day I received the Damon Runyon Fellowship. I was absolutely delighted. I wanted to make quite a radical switch in research, from the chemistry of bacterial cells to the biology of human cells. The Fellowship gave me the freedom to explore this new direction.

"The Foundation gave me my start as well as the confidence and independence to develop my own research. It was a turning point for me, and it was the first time I really thought earnestly about cancer biology."

Full circle

"In the course of my nearly three decades as a professor, I have trained several Damon Runyon Fellows who I think will be future superstars. Joining the Board of Damon Runyon was an enormous honor, given the caliber of its scientists and philanthropic leaders. I'd always felt committed to the Foundation: there's a sense of connectedness that prevails over time.

"I think one of the great strengths of the Foundation is the breadth of its vision. Some of the investigators that it funds are brilliant young scientists who may not necessarily begin with a direct focus on cancer, but who have a high probability of one day making a major contribution in this field. Damon Runyon is a leader in that regard."

GO VERTICAL CHICAGO

Scaling the Sears Tower

Think pink stilettos are appropriate footwear for climbing the Sears Tower? One woman did – and although she didn't break any records (or ankles), she was a part of the record-breaking seventh annual Go Vertical Chicago, the world's highest indoor stair climb, which took place last November. The sold-out event attracted almost 2000 people and raised \$400,000 for the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation.



Climbers from as far away as Germany and Italy were joined by Chicago locals, their families and supporters. Terry Purcell, 37, won the men's division with a time of 13:55 minutes. Cindy Harris, 39, won the women's division for the seventh straight year with a time of 15:45 minutes. The record time is 13:26 minutes, set in 2005.

Many participants were cancer survivors, while others climbed for friends and loved ones. The youngest climber was 7 years old and the oldest 80 years old.

Go Vertical New York

Stay tuned for more information on a possible Go Vertical stair climb in New York by joining our email newsletter list. Visit www.damonrunyon.org to sign up.

GREAT URBAN RACE

We've partnered with the Great Urban Race, an urban adventure in which teams of two solve twelve clues, have a wild city adventure and complete fun challenges. For the New York Race, one of the clues will involve the Foundation. The organizers will also donate \$20 for each team that signs up as a result of hearing about the race through Damon Runyon.

We'll be recruiting participants and volunteers for the event on August 15, 2009 and welcome anyone who wants to join us. You can learn more about it at www.greaturbanrace.com.



Contact Kim Kubert at 212.455.0501 or kim.kubert@damonrunyon.org

Stage and science – a double exclusive

SUPPORTERS GO BEHIND THE SCENES AT GUYS AND DOLLS THEATER EVENT

Our theater events bring supporters together with our young scientists for five-star dinner-and-show evenings. These informal gatherings allow valuable interaction between the people who fund research and those who make it happen. Theater events also reinforce the Foundation's connection with Broadway, which stems from Damon Runyon's vivid tales of the men and women who lived, loved and swindled on the street in the 1930s.



Spencer Moses as Rusty Charlie, Tituss Burgess as Nicely-Nicely Johnson and Steve Rosen as Benny Southstreet in *Guys and Dolls*.

On February 25th, we celebrated the revival of *Guys and Dolls*, the musical based on Damon Runyon's stories, with a special preview performance. In addition to speaking informally with four young cancer researchers at dinner, guests met with cast members Steve Rosen (Benny Southstreet) and Tituss Burgess (Nicely-Nicely Johnson) for a lively question-and-answer session after the show.

Damon Runyon Broadway Tickets is selling the best seats in the house for *Guys and Dolls* on Broadway, as well as for many other shows. Call 212.455.0550 to book.

DISTINGUISHED BUSINESS AND MEDICAL LEADERS JOIN BOARD

We're delighted to welcome three leading figures from business and cancer research to our Board of Directors:



Mr. Jay Ireland

Mr. Jay Ireland is President and CEO of GE Asset Management, a global investment firm that manages billions of assets for public and private institutions, as well as the funds in GE's pension and other benefit programs. He is a member of GE's Corporate Executive Council and the GE Capital Board of Directors. Previously, he was President of NBC Universal Television Stations and Network Operations, with responsibility for NBC Universal's 10 television stations and the Telemundo network.

Todd R. Golub, MD is the Founding Director of the Cancer Program at the Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT. He is the Charles A. Dana Investigator at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator.



Dr. Todd R. Golub

His research focuses on genomic approaches to the study of cancer and novel approaches to drug development. A recipient of many awards, Dr. Golub also serves on the National Cancer Institute's Board of Scientific Advisors.

William L. Carroll, MD, the Julie and Edward J. Minskoff Professor of Pediatrics, directs the NYU Cancer Institute and the Pediatric Hematology Oncology Program at NYU Medical Center. Dr. Carroll oversees all aspects of cancer research and treatment on the NYU Medical Center campus. He has attained international renown as a leader in using genomics to study childhood tumors. As Chair of the Children's Oncology Group Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia Committee, Dr. Carroll directs the largest clinical trials network worldwide for children with cancer.



Dr. William L. Carroll

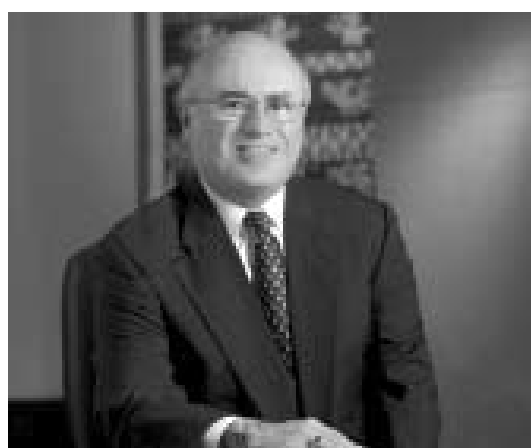
Invitation to our Annual Breakfast, May 27th

At our Annual Breakfast, we bring together the most exceptional scientists, outstanding business people and informed philanthropists – all committed to supporting innovative cancer research.

Our theme this year is *High Impact On Cancer*, emphasizing our 63 years of funding discoveries that save lives. We are proud to honor **Richard T. Clark, Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Merck & Co., Inc.**, an outstanding leader who shares our commitment to cancer research.

The event will begin with a coffee reception at 7:30 am, followed by breakfast and program from 8:00–9:30 am at The Rainbow Room, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City.

For more information or to reserve tickets, please contact Kim Kubert, Director of Special Events, at 212.455.0501 or kim.kubert@damonrunyon.org.



Richard T. Clark
Chairman, President and
CEO of Merck & Co., Inc.



Annual Breakfast 2008: Michael Eisner with James Burrows



Annual Breakfast 2008: Innovation Award winner Dr. David Kirsch addresses the audience.

Three Novel Ideas Win Innovation Award



Three high-risk, high-reward projects that could make a big impact on cancer have each won a Damon Runyon-Rachleff Innovation Award. The prize, given to early-career scientists, is for a total of \$450,000 over three years.

To see a recent NBC news feature on the Innovation Award, visit our website at www.damonrunyon.org

A Blood Test for Ovarian and Lung Cancers



Muneesh Tewari, MD, PhD
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
Seattle, Washington

Detecting early signs of cancer in the blood has long eluded scientists. Dr. Tewari is harnessing computing power and DNA sequencing to detect microscopic elements of tumors in blood.

His work could lead to the development of a highly sensitive blood test for cancers, particularly ovarian and lung, both of which are notoriously difficult to detect in their initial stages.

Radical Improvements of Bone Marrow Transplant Safety



Ivan Maillard, MD, PhD and Yi Zhang, MD, PhD
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Bone marrow transplantation is frequently used to treat cancer, mainly leukemias and lymphomas. However, despite close matching of donors and patients, sometimes transplanted cells do not recognize the host's body as compatible. This effect, called Graft Versus Host disease, leads to severe tissue and organ damage, infection, and can result in death.

Drs. Maillard and Zhang's promising discovery establishes preliminary evidence that a specific cell activity is a driving force behind Graft Versus Host disease. Moreover, as the activity is known to be present in other diseases, there may be existing drugs available to treat it.

Discovery of New Genetic Markers of Cancer



John L. Rinn, PhD
Broad Institute, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School
Boston, Massachusetts

Dr. Rinn and his colleagues have discovered a new class of molecule that may have important implications for understanding and treating cancer. lincRNAs – large intergenic non-coding RNAs – are unique from other materials in cells, however, their precise function remains unknown.

Dr. Rinn aims to decipher the workings of lincRNAs and proposes, based on his pioneering early research, that they may have a role in tumor formation. His work could lead to new ways to diagnose and target multiple cancer types.

NEW ADMINISTRATION PRIORITIZES CANCER RESEARCH

Fighting cancer is back on the political agenda, with the President calling for a multi-year plan to double cancer research. Thanks in large part to Senator Arlen Specter, the administration has injected \$10.4 billion into the National Institutes of Health, the nation's medical research agency, raising its budget to \$39 billion. Although no funding has been explicitly directed towards young investigators, NIH officials noted the importance of investing in this group.

At Damon Runyon, we're excited about the renewed focus on scientific discovery and cancer research. With cancer still the leading cause of death for people aged under 85, we are optimistic that this new direction will help speed development of new ways to prevent, diagnose and treat this disease.



November 2008 Fellows

The Damon Runyon Fellowship Award supports the training of the brightest young postdoctoral scientists conducting basic and translational cancer research in leading laboratories across the country. The three-year award is designed to enlist the skills and creativity of the next generation in the fight against cancer.

Christopher S. Campbell, PhD, with his sponsor Arshad B. Desai, PhD, at the University of California, San Diego, California, is studying mechanisms that stabilize the genome. His research will help us understand how **disruption of these processes can lead to cancer**.

Oscar R. Colegio, MD, PhD, [HHMI Fellow] with his sponsor Ruslan M. Medzhitov, PhD, at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, is studying the **role of immune cells, called macrophages, in cancers**. His goal is to understand how macrophages are recruited to tumors, and how they induce changes resulting in metastasis (cancer spread), particularly of **lung, breast, and skin cancers**. These studies may lead to new methods to limit or prevent metastasis.

Jason Michael Crawford, PhD, with his sponsor Jon Clardy, PhD, at Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, is developing DNA-based methods to **discover novel compounds from microbes, such as bacteria and fungi**, towards the development of improved **anticancer therapeutics**.

William J. Greenleaf, PhD, with his sponsor X. Sunney Xie, PhD, at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, is developing highly-sensitive fluorescence technology that will allow observation of single molecules of individual enzymes, providing insight into how **cellular machinery may malfunction in cancers**.

William Rodney Hardy, PhD, with his sponsor Michael R. Green, MD, PhD, at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, Massachusetts, is studying a process called **oncogene-induced senescence, which stops tumor cell development**, thus protecting the body against cancer. Dr. Hardy hopes to reveal ways by which this process can be **exploited as a treatment for cancer**.



Kristina M. Herbert, PhD, with her sponsor Joan A. Steitz, PhD, at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, is studying the mechanism by which small RNAs, called microRNAs, are produced and the regulation of this process within the cell. She hopes to gain understanding of **why certain microRNAs are expressed at low levels in cancers**.

Simon Jenni, PhD, [HHMI Fellow] with his sponsor Stephen C. Harrison, PhD, at Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, is studying the structure of kinetochores, protein complexes that control the segregation of chromosomes during cell division. **Discrepancies in chromosome distribution occur in many cancers and diseases such as Down's syndrome**. His research will provide a firmer foundation for our understanding of cancer.

Jung-Min Kee, PhD, with his sponsor Thomas W. Muir, PhD, at The Rockefeller University, New York, New York, is attempting to define the function of histidine phosphorylation, a particular type of protein modification that can be linked to **liver cancer**. He is developing novel research tools by combining synthetic chemistry and biology, which could ultimately lead to **new and more effective cancer treatments**.



Young Kwon, PhD, with his sponsor Norbert Perrimon, PhD, at Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, is aiming to discover new regulators of the **insulin signaling pathway** that keep the pathway "in check" during normal cellular growth as well as tumor suppression. These studies may lead to the identification of **new tumor suppressor pathways**.

Ken S. Lau, PhD, [Robert Black Fellow] with his sponsors Kevin M. Haigis, PhD, and Douglas A. Lauffenburger, PhD, at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, is working to identify **new proteins that interact with a cancer-causing molecule called Ras**, which is disrupted in over half of **colorectal cancer cases**. In the future, these proteins may become effective targets for new drugs to treat this deadly disease.



Tiffany A. Reese, PhD, with her sponsor Herbert W. Virgin, MD, PhD, at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, is exploring **how the immune system recognizes persistent viral infections**. Because these viruses persist for a lifetime and cause **lymphomas and tumors** in people with weakened immune systems, understanding the intricate balance between viral persistence and immune control is fundamentally important.

Xu Tan, PhD, with his sponsor Stephen J. Elledge, PhD, at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, is studying the role of the BRCA1 gene, which has been linked to **familial breast cancer**. His goal is to identify genes that act in concert with BRCA1, which could explain the specific effect of BRCA1 mutations on breast tissue carcinogenesis.

Jesse Zalatan, PhD, with his sponsor Wendell A. Lim, PhD, at University of California, San Francisco, California, is studying the role of molecules, called scaffold proteins, in kinase signaling pathways. **Defects in these pathways are often associated with cancer and other physiological disorders**.

DAMON RUNYON CLINICAL INVESTIGATOR SYMPOSIUM

Some of the most influential and innovative physician scientists in the US today will be speaking about their translational research at the Damon Runyon Clinical Investigator Symposium on April 27th. Held in partnership with the New York Academy of Sciences, this is a very special chance to meet and learn from some of the leading figures in cancer research today. **Contact Scientific Director Yung Lie, PhD, at 212.455.0521 or yung.lie@damonrunyon.org**

- > What makes a great cancer researcher?
- > Invitation to our Annual Breakfast,
May 27th
- > Three Novel Ideas Win Innovation Award
- > Broadway's Best Seats For Mother's Day

Broadway's Best Seats For Mother's Day

If your mother enjoys dramas or musicals, you can guarantee a great night out with our Damon Runyon Broadway Tickets – the best seats in the theater and a gift that also supports cancer research. These premium seats are normally reserved for VIPs or industry insiders, but a select number are available especially for supporters of the Foundation.

You can purchase tickets to current shows or a gift certificate so she can choose the show and date. And you receive a tax deduction too.

Please tell others about our service. If you refer three new customers, you will be eligible for a free pair of tickets. We also welcome corporate clients.

Please call 212.455.0550 between 9 am and 5 pm for more information.
www.damonrunyon.org/broadway.

Premier Circle

The **Broadway Premier Circle** is a premium membership service that gives patrons early access to the best seats, even at the most popular new shows, along with other exclusive benefits.



It's a great way to increase your involvement with the Foundation and enjoy the best Broadway has to offer.

For information about Premier Circle benefits, please call 212.455.0550 or visit our website at www.damonrunyon.org.

2009 SPRING SEASON SHOWS

*See our website for a full list of all available shows, seating and ticket prices.

OPENING APRIL

9 to 5: A new musical based on the 1980 film about three women who plan to get even with their sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical boss.

Desire Under the Elms: A young wife tragically falls in love with her grown step-son in Eugene O'Neill's classic drama.

Joe Turner's Come and Gone: The second play in August Wilson's 10-part, decade-by-decade account of African-American lives in Pittsburgh.

reasons to be pretty: Neil LaBute's new drama confronts America's obsession with physical beauty.

Mary Stuart: A thrilling story of scheming and betrayal between England's Elizabeth I and her rival cousin, Mary Queen of Scots.

Rock of Ages: The off-Broadway hit about Hollywood and rock and roll in 1986. The musical features hits from 80s rock bands including Journey, Whitesnake, STYX and Poison.

POPULAR AND ACCLAIMED

August: Osage County: The 2008 Tony Award winner about the dysfunctional Weston family's return to Oklahoma after the disappearance of it's patriarch.

West Side Story: New York's own *Romeo and Juliet*, West Side Story tells the musical tale of Tony and Maria and the gang warfare that threatens their love.

Jersey Boys: The story of the legendary Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. Featuring the hit songs "Big Girls Don't Cry," "Oh, What a Night" and "Can't Take My Eyes Off You."

South Pacific: The iconic Rodgers and Hammerstein musical and the winner of seven 2008 Tony Awards, including Best Musical Revival, continues its radiant run.

TO ORDER TICKETS CALL 212.455.0550 or 1.877.7CANCER

(For more information about our Broadway Tickets Service, visit our website at www.damonrunyon.org/broadway)

WAYS TO GIVE

- > **Plan for cancer research in your will or trust** You can support the Foundation's important work while also meeting your financial needs and those of your loved ones. There are many types of planned gifts that enable you to make a significant contribution to the fight against cancer.
- > **Sponsor a scientist** You can have a direct impact on the research of a brilliant young scientist. Sponsor a Damon Runyon researcher for one or more years of his or her award and we will name the award for you, your family, or in honor of someone you choose. Your support could be crucial to the development of cancer treatments and cures of the future.
- > **Give annually** We rely on annual gifts from generous individuals, foundations and corporations to fund our research programs. Donate by mail, over the phone or on our secure website at www.damonrunyon.org. We also accept securities, which may enable you to enjoy significant tax savings.
- > **Pay a tribute** We welcome and appreciate donations to celebrate your friends and loved ones on birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, Mother's Day and Father's Day, as well as gifts in memory of those close to you. In each case a special card will be sent and, as always, 100% of your gift will be used to support cancer research.
- > **Attend an event** We specialize in events that are high in content yet short on lengthy speeches. Join us, meet other informed supporters and have the chance to engage with current and former Damon Runyon scientists working to defeat cancer.
- > **Purchase Broadway tickets** Enjoy the best seats on Broadway while supporting cancer research with a tax deductible contribution. Call 212.455.0550 or visit www.damonrunyon.org/broadway to learn more.
- > **Donate online** You can easily donate online via our secure website at www.damonrunyon.org

To learn more about ways to support the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation, contact Katie Levine, Director of Development, at 212.455.0504 or visit us at www.damonrunyon.org/donate

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* ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS ARE PAID THROUGH OUR DAMON RUNYON BROADWAY TICKETS SERVICE AND ENDOWMENT.

Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation

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