



No guts, no glory

High-risk, high-reward fund aims to accelerate cancer research



Mr. Charles Stiefel, inaugural donor to the Discovery Fund

The best scientists think outside the box, but most funding sources favor work that builds incrementally on past research. That slows the pace of innovation in cancer care.

“Although my career was in the pharmaceutical industry, my many friends in academia have often lamented the fact that some of the most promising research projects cannot get funded. They have described a ‘Catch 22’ scenario, whereby a project cannot obtain NIH or academic funding because insufficient data have been generated; yet without any financial support, it is impossible to generate these data,”

said Charles Stiefel, the inaugural donor to the Yale Cancer Center Discovery Fund, designed to support “high-risk, high-reward” research.

Donors to the fund will play an active role in selecting projects for support and are invited to serve a two-year term on the fund’s board along with Yale Cancer Center leadership.

Federal funding for medical research has declined in real dollars since 2009. The National Cancer Institute budget for FY 2013 will be approximately \$4.78

billion, \$293 million less than in FY 2012, a reduction of 5.8 percent. “So if you want to break new ground in your science, you have to find other ways,” explained Thomas Lynch, Jr., MD, Director of Yale Cancer Center.

These cuts come at a time when the potential of cancer research to advance is extraordinary. Yale scientists are doing exciting work in cancer biology

side effects,” he explained.

While the fund takes a venture capital style approach of embracing risk, it rigorously tracks outcomes so that donors can see the impact of their investment. Scientists will not have to spend years on small pilot studies before getting support for a significant project. “I think the faculty are grateful for the opportunity to submit a project idea to a

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and genetics, personalized medicine, and other areas that promise substantially new and better treatments.

Charles, of Raleigh, North Carolina, and his wife, Daneen, have made cancer the focus of their philanthropy. “My father, mother, uncle, and younger brother all died of cancer; and my two older brothers and I have successfully battled cancer. I have learned first-hand what a terrible disease this is,” he said.

His experience has also made him keenly aware that the work of developing better treatments needs to move faster. “My little brother died in the early seventies of Hodgkin’s Disease, a cancer that is now highly curable. My dream scenario would be to see higher cure rates for all types of cancer, as well as treatments with fewer and less severe

fund like this,” Dr. Lynch said.

The strength of the Yale Cancer Center faculty was one of the reasons that Charles chose to support the Discovery Fund. He has a long history with Yale, having graduated from Yale College in 1972. “Firstly, I have always felt that Yale is a very special place,” he said. “Secondly, Yale Cancer Center is one of the top oncology centers in the world. And finally, I have a lot of confidence in Tom Lynch, who brings a wealth of experience and a very unique skill set to Yale.”

When the board is complete, investigators will begin submitting proposals. “We’re going to be giving awards that are big enough to really accomplish something,” said Dr. Lynch. “That’s what this is all about – accomplishing something.”