Chief Scientific Officer; Director, Sloan Kettering Institute Joan Massagué

Joan Massagué, PhD, a world leader in research on signaling pathways and transcriptional programs that regulate normal cell behavior and cancer metastasis, became Director of the Sloan Kettering Institute in 2014.

A native of Barcelona, Spain, Dr. Massagué earned his PhD in pharmacy and biochemistry from the University of Barcelona in 1978. In 1982, he completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Brown University, where he worked on mechanisms of insulin action. Later that year, he became assistant professor of biochemistry at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

The Joan Massagué Lab

Joan Massagué studies the control of stem cell growth and phenotype in tumor progression, metastasis, and response to therapy.

Learn more →

In 1989, Dr. Massagué joined Memorial Sloan Kettering as the Alfred P. Sloan Chair in Cancer Biology and was appointed a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator. He served as Chairman of the Sloan Kettering Institute Cell Biology Program from 1989 to 2003 and has been a Founding Chair of the Cancer Biology and Genetics Program since 2003. He is also a professor at Weill-Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences.

Throughout his 30-year career, Dr. Massagué has been lauded for the originality and importance of his work elucidating the mechanism of action for transforming growth factor-beta (TGF-β) signaling. The TGF-β family of proteins plays a key role in the proliferation and differentiation of many different cell types, controlling the formation and regeneration of tissues from embryonic life to adulthood.

VIDEO | 02:30

The Next Wave of Cancer Science

Two Memorial Sloan Kettering researchers, including Chief Scientific Officer and Sloan Kettering Institute Director Joan Massagué, share their perspective on the next wave of cancer science.

Video Details →

Dr. Massagué identified the TGF-β receptors, their mechanism of signal transduction, and the central concept of how this pathway controls cell division and developmental fate. He provided a direct explanation for how external signals block cell division through CDK inhibitors and cell fate through chromatin regulators. These mechanisms are crucial in embryonic development, and their disruption causes congenital disorders and cancer.

More recently, work led by Dr. Massagué has identified genes and mechanisms that promote cancer metastasis to the bone, lung, and brain in a number of cancer types. This research has illuminated the basis for cancer lethality and opened new avenues for treatment.

Dr. Massagué is a member of the US National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Spanish Royal Academies of Medicine and of Pharmacy, and the European Molecular Biology Organization. He is the recipient of many prestigious awards including the Passano Prize, the Vilcek Prize, the BBVA Frontiers of Science Prize, the Prince of Asturias Prize, the Pasarow Prize, and other honors. Dr. Massagué is the first incumbent of the Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chair.

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