In October, Dr. Ethan Basch and Dr. Antonia Bennett were awarded a Department of Defense Idea Development Award for the development of pain endpoint models for use in cancer drug approval and labeling. Despite the significant impact pain has on patients with advanced prostate cancer, there are no established methods of measuring pain in clinical trials. Creating a reliable metric for pain associated with prostate cancer will facilitate the development of drugs to reduce pain in men with prostate cancer and better enable clinical trials to evaluate the full scope of patients’ quality of life.

Dr. Thomas Atkinson and other members of Ethan Basch’s research team were awarded the 2010 Best Clinical Poster of the Year at the 17th Annual ISOQOL Conference. Their poster, “Associations of Patient vs. Clinician Adverse Event Reports with Functional Status,” reported a prospective study of adverse symptom event reporting by patients and clinicians, which demonstrated that patient-reported information is a better indicator of daily overall health status than clinician reports. These results underline the clinical and scientific value of patient-reported adverse symptom events and are further evidence that scientists, regulators, and clinicians should have access to this information when evaluating drugs for their inclusion in clinical trials. Dr. Atkinson’s coinvestigators were Xiaoyu Jia, Laura Sit, Mike Fruscione, Dawn Lavene, Mary Shaw, Lauren Rogak, Glenn Heller, and Ethan Basch.

In September, Dr. Ethan Basch was awarded a 5-year NCI contract, “Development of the Patient-Reported Outcomes version of the Common Terminology Criteria for Adverse Events (PRO-CTCAE).” This award is to expand the capabilities of the current PRO-CTCAE system and support validation and feasibility research in the NCI cooperative group network. The three primary aims of the contract are to increase accessibility of the PRO-CTCAE system for cancer patients and researchers, including translation of the items in Spanish; conducting a feasibility study in NCI clinical trial networks; and to evaluate shared (patient-clinician) and stand-alone (patient only) models for symptoms adverse event reporting. Dr. Jennifer Hay is a coinvestigator on this contract.

Dr. Antonia Bennett was a panelist for a patient-reported outcomes research discussion, “Is Any Data Better Than No Data? The Use of Mixed Modalities for PRO Data Collection in Clinical Trials” at the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research 13th Annual European Congress. The meeting was held in Prague, Czech Republic on November 7th, 2010. She presented the potential benefits of mixed mode data collection (e.g. web and interactive voice response [IVR]) which include less non-ignorable missing data and a method for adjusting power calculations.

Dr. Victoria Blinder was awarded a 5-year grant by the American Cancer Society to support her project: “Ethnic Differences in the Impact of Breast Cancer on Employment Status, Financial Situation, and Quality of Life.” The objective of Dr. Blinder’s study is to compare the impact of breast cancer on employment, income, and quality of life in African American, Caucasian, and Latina women. A cohort of breast cancer survivors will be prospectively followed along with a cohort of healthy ethnicity-matched women in order to distinguish cancer-specific effects from those due to fluctuations in the economy. Through this study, we will gain a more complete understanding of the economic impact of breast cancer and of whether women of different ethnicities may be disparately impacted by the disease. These results will ultimately inform the development of ethnically sensitive and relevant interventions to improve the lives of breast cancer survivors and their families.
FAREWELL TO LARRY ENGEL

Dr. Larry Engel is relocating to Chapel Hill, NC and has accepted a position as Associate Professor of Epidemiology at the University of North Carolina, School of Public Health. He will begin his new position February 1, 2011. In addition to teaching a course in environmental epidemiology, Larry will continue a research project started with several collaborators at MSKCC investigating the relationship between polymorphisms in genes related to detoxification pathways, immunity, and DNA repair to mutations in gastrointestinal stromal tumors. He will begin a large population-based study that will expand upon previous research linking environmental exposure to organochlorines to higher incidence of liver cancer. Larry will also begin a prospective study tracking several health endpoints among workers cleaning the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Biological samples will be collected from approximately 55,000 individuals working in the clean-up effort and measurements of neurological, immunological, and pulmonary health as well as incidence of cancers will be tracked for a period of at least ten years. The study will investigate the different jobs performed by the workers and the different biological exposures.

Dr. Engel’s work at MSKCC focused on environmental and occupational risk factors for cancer and the role of genetic susceptibility. Larry is the Principal Investigator of a study examining the relationship of blood levels of organochlorines and aflatoxins with the risk of primary liver cancer. He is also Principal Investigator for a study of breast cancer risk within a large agricultural cohort; he is currently examining the roles of pesticide and sun exposures in genetic variation in the vitamin D pathway. Larry has been with the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at MSKCC for seven years. We wish him well and best of luck in his future endeavors.

RECENT PUBLICATION

In a paper recently published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Cami Sima, Katherine Panageas and Deborah Schrag demonstrated that a sizeable proportion of patients living with advanced cancers continue to receive routine cancer screening tests that are unlikely to provide a meaningful benefit.


STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please join us in welcoming our new staff!

Paige Nobles, MA  Research Study Assistant, Health Outcomes Group
Paige holds a MA in Counseling for Mental Health and Wellness from New York University. Prior to coming to MSKCC, she worked at the Center for Health, Identity, Behavior, and Prevention Studies at NYU. She is working with Elena Elkin and investigators at Weill Medical College on a study of decision support tools for women considering screening mammography.

Sean Ryan, MS  Research Study Assistant, Health Outcomes Group
Sean recently graduated with an MS in Rehabilitation Psychology from the University of Wisconsin. He will be joining Ethan Basch’s research team to facilitate patient self-reports of symptoms for the STAR study (IRB 04-020), interviewing patients and clinicians about their experience with the PRO-CTCAE platform (IRB 10-072), and validation of the PRO-CTCAE items (study pending).

Amethyst Saldia, BS  Research Study Assistant, Epidemiology Service
Amethyst holds a BS in Brain, Behavior and Cognitive Science from the University of Michigan. After graduating from college, Amethyst worked as a Community HealthCorps*VISTA member at the Ryan/Chelsea-Clinton Community Health Center in New York. She will be working with Dr. Robert Kurtz and Dr. Sara Olson on the Pancreatic Cancer Family Registry (IRB 02-102)

EPIDEMIOLOGY & BIOSTATISTICS HOLIDAY FOOD DRIVE

This holiday season we are organizing a food drive for the Food Bank For NYC, the city’s largest food bank working to end hunger in the five boroughs. Through Monday, December 20th, we will be collecting and donating canned food to help those New Yorkers most in need.

Please join the rest of the staff in bringing nonperishable food donations and placing them in the boxes on the 2nd and 3rd floor reception areas as well as desk 356c. The top ten most needed items include canned beans, milk, fruit, vegetables, juice, meat, fish, soup, stew and peanut butter. The lists of items most in need are posted on the cork board on the 2nd and 3rd floors. Items must also be:

- In the original package, unopened
- With an expiration date
- In a plastic jar, aluminum or other container, but no glass

For more information on the Food Bank For NYC, please visit: www.foodbanknyc.org