

## SAN ANTONIO MEDICAL SCHOOL GETS MILLIONS TO RESEARCH BREAST CANCER



DR. PATRICK SUNG, SHOWN WITH ELOISE DRAY, PH.D.

*San Antonio cancer researchers have made significant funding gains in recent years, in part because of the state program that pumps billions of dollars into efforts to fight the disease.*

On Nov. 5, voters reauthorized the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, or CPRIT, by an emphatic 64 percent. That clears the way for the agency to award another \$3 billion-plus in grants.

“Texas just gets it right,” said Patrick Sung, a biochemist at UT Health San Antonio, who was among the first to understand the roles of BRCA1 and 2. Women who inherit certain mutations in either of these genes, which suppress tumors, are at greater risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer.

Sung left Yale University for UT Health because of CPRIT. Since he started at the medical school on Jan. 1, he’s attracted \$20.9 million in funding to support his work developing therapies for inherited types of breast cancer.

On the East Coast, he said, research funds for his lab were harder to come by. But Texas is different.

**Since 2007, the state agency has invested \$2.4 billion in prevention and research projects, becoming the nation’s second-largest public funder of cancer research behind the National Cancer Institute.**

“We should be proud that for at least another decade, Texans will aggressively research this awful disease and have the resources required to support crucial prevention interventions,” said Marina Hench, government relations director at

NEWSLETTER

11.27.2019

the Cancer Action Network, the advocacy arm of the American Cancer Society.

San Antonio lags behind Houston and Dallas when it comes to funding for cancer research, said Dr. George Peoples, a military surgeon and cancer specialist who founded Cancer Insight, a San Antonio clinical research organization, in 2014. Yet he’s seen a steady increase in CPRIT grants coming to scientists in the city. Earlier this year, his company helped three biotech firms land more than \$31 million from the state fund.

Peoples said San Antonio is “rich with resources to bring to bear on cancer research.” He highlighted several private companies, as well as private nonprofits, such as the Southwest Research Institute and Texas Biomedical Institute, and public institutions, including military medical facilities and the University of Texas at San Antonio and UT Health.

President William Henrich of UT Health said the institution has amassed nearly \$389 million in cancer research funds over the past decade and developed more than 20 cancer drugs approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration — which is a feat considering 97 percent of cancer drugs developed and tested in clinical trials never make it to market.

The school has secured \$43 million in grants so far this year to study cancer.

*...continue to next page*

Sung, who oversees his own lab on the UT Health campus in the South Texas Medical Center, said the work can feel slow-moving. He spends much of his time applying for additional funds to support his team's work.

"Cancer is very smart and finds a way to escape the actions of drugs," Sung said.

His mother died at 65 of cancer, and he's spent the past 25 years working toward a cure. He believes researchers will make some big breakthroughs in the next few years.

In September, he received a competitive Outstanding Investigator Award from the National Cancer Institute, which will provide \$6.1 million in research funds through 2026.

"Many drugs were first tested in breast cancer," said Dr. Robert Hromas, dean of the university's Long School of Medicine. These drugs, however, were later found to be effective against other types of cancer.

Currently, Hromas is collaborating with Sung, investigating a new therapy targeting inherited breast and ovarian cancers, which occur at higher rates in this region. San Antonio had a rate of 24.8 breast cancer deaths per 100,000 women, according to the City Health Dashboard, higher than the state's mortality rate of 20.

"A single cure for cancer isn't likely," said Dr. Ruben Mesa, director of the Mays Cancer Center at UT Health, the only National Cancer Institute-designated facility in South Texas.

"But researchers have engineered advances to help patients with early-stage cancer. Some cancers that in the 1970s were thought to be death sentences," he said, "now are either curable or treatable."

**Breast cancer remains the most common type of cancer, affecting 1 in 8 women.**

Scientists have learned a lot about hereditary types of breast cancer genes, including the insight that 1 in 400 people carry the harmful mutation and have a 50 percent chance of passing it on to their children.

Patients can now take a blood test and find out whether they have the mutation. Under the Affordable Care Act, most insurers are required to cover the cost of the test for high-risk patients.

# CARE CLOSE TO HOME

STORY COURTESY EXPRESS-NEWS



**Melissa Stockhoff**, a wife and mother of three, said she hopes her children will get the BRCA test when they're older.

"It's better to know than to wonder, because then you'll be able to do something about it," said the Stone Oak resident, who has the BRCA mutation and lives with stage 4 breast cancer.

"I was 33 when I was diagnosed," she said. "I remember thinking, 'This is the beginning of the end.'"

Her youngest child was one when she first felt a lump in her breast. At the time, she lived close to MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Stockhoff had a strong support network of friends while she underwent 16 rounds of chemotherapy, a mastectomy on her left breast and 30 rounds of radiation. Her long blonde hair fell out from the aggressive treatment.

Over the past four years, tumors have spread to other parts of her body, most recently her liver.

When the cancer came back, she remembers feeling fortunate that her husband, Andy Stockhoff, took a job at Valero Energy in San Antonio. The city, she said, has a number of cancer care resources.

Last year, the Mays Cancer Center established an affiliation with MD Anderson Cancer Center. But the city has long had strong ties to the breast cancer research community.

Next month, from Dec. 10-14, thousands of medical professionals from across the globe are expected to attend the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium at the Convention Center. The meeting has been organized and held in the city since 1977.

Dr. Virginia Kaklamani, leader of the Mays Cancer Center's breast oncology program and Stockhoff's doctor, said a lot has changed since she started treating cancer patients in 2000.

The Mays Cancer Center has more than 100 clinical trials underway with promising cancer treatments. More than 300 clinicians, scientists and students affiliated with the

center are studying cancer in labs throughout UT Health San Antonio.

"We're curing a lot more breast cancer patients and helping them live longer," Kaklamani said, adding that the new medical discoveries ease the burden on cancer patients and their families.

Stockhoff is enrolled in a phase 3 clinical trial at the Mays Cancer Center. She takes a newer chemo pill called Teseaxel once every three weeks in combination with another drug.

---

**"It's been a roller coaster," she said. "There's been a lot of heartache and tears, but every down has brought a sweeter up."**

---

Since her breast cancer diagnosis, several family members have been tested and have taken preventive measures.

"That's kind of the beauty of it," she said. "Now, hopefully my mom, my sister and my brother won't have to deal with cancer."

# ST. BALDRICK'S SPRING CYCLE GRANTS

We have been invited to submit **ONE GRANT** application for the Spring Cycle for each of the mechanisms listed below. If you would like to be considered, please submit a 1-page abstract on your cancer research and NIH Biosketch by **Monday, December 2, 2019** (no late applications will be accepted) to [ctcgrants@uthscsa.edu](mailto:ctcgrants@uthscsa.edu).

- [RESEARCH GRANT GUIDELINES](#)
- [SUMMER FELLOWSHIP GUIDELINES](#)
- [SUPPORTIVE CARE RESEARCH GRANT GUIDELINES](#)
- [INTERNATIONAL SCHOLAR GUIDLINES](#)
- [SCHOLAR GUIDELINES](#)

Please be sure you indicate which application you're submitting for when you return the abstract.

Letter of Intents are due by January 31, 2020, and full proposals due by March 27, 2020, except for the Summer Fellowship Award. For the Fellows Award, no LOI is due to the Foundation. The full proposal will be due January 3, 2020.

Fellows are funded based on scientific review. Infrastructure grants are funded based on need, expected outcomes, and local St. Baldrick's participation, with a strong priority on geographic areas with no other St. Baldrick's funding.

## UT HEALTH SAN ANTONIO RECEIVES FUNDING TO EXPAND SITES OF CARE

*The University of Texas System Board of Regents on Nov. 14 approved \$80 million from the Permanent University Fund (PUF) Bond Proceeds for UT Health San Antonio to expand its sites of care, including the construction of a multispecialty/research hospital in San Antonio.*

While still in the early planning phase, this expansion will transform patient care in multiple sub-specialties with the critical integration of advanced medical research from San Antonio's leading academic health organization. The hospital facility will integrate exceptional patient care with robust clinical research to more comprehensively care for the unique health needs of San Antonio's diverse community.

As such, the new facility will be a unique addition to San Antonio's hospital environment. Having increased access to the newest drugs and surgical devices in hundreds of clinical trials provides an

extraordinary opportunity for patients to receive the most innovative health care without leaving the city.

In this effort, UT Health San Antonio will maintain its essential collaboration with its primary clinical and teaching partner, University Health System (UHS), as the two organizations continually look for ways to work together for Bexar County and surrounding areas to provide the best possible health outcomes. **While specific details are yet to be defined, this expansion of innovative health care service with these strong partners is an unprecedented opportunity to positively impact community health.**

UT Health San Antonio intends to pay for the clinical expansion with a combination of funds from current clinical operations, debt and charitable donations, as well as the PUF distribution.

"We are proud to be at the forefront of innovation with a new facility that will

support the extraordinary work of our doctors, nurses and other health care providers, including our significant research community," said William L. Henrich, M.D., MACP, president of UT Health San Antonio. "These funds and a new facility represent a welcome and needed investment in San Antonio. It is beneficial not only for patients, but also for the educational, research and highly specialized patient care services that our university provides through five schools, including medicine, dentistry, nursing, health professions and biomedical sciences."

"It is also a demonstration of The University of Texas fulfilling its mission of advancing health to serve Texans and the world," Dr. Henrich added. "I am incredibly grateful to the UT System Board of Regents, Chancellor James Milliken, Executive Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs John Zerwas, M.D., and the entire leadership team of the UT System for their partnership to advance health care in San Antonio and beyond."

In the recent President's Forum, President Henrich discussed how the strategy for Enterprise Design for Growth and Effectiveness (EDGE) will intentionally redesign our operating model. This will enable UT Health to achieve the financial growth our institution needs to meet the challenges of today's competitive marketplace and to better serve our community's needs. Today's current administrative support model — or how we provide certain support services — cannot sustain our growth, which is projected to be \$300-350 million over the next five years.

The process of change has been in motion for several years. In 2016, we began asking how we could propel ourselves toward a more efficient and smoothly operating organization. A few outcomes executed to

date include the 2017 release of My UT Health, our intranet site which serves as an internal communications hub that is also the one source of truth for organizational information, as well as numerous initiatives to improve the culture of the university.

With the EDGE initiative, we are looking at the intermediate future of the health care marketplace, the growing need for skilled health care professionals, the continued investment required for advanced research, and the necessity to retain our competitive advantage in the healthcare space as the region's only academic health center.

President Henrich shared the following quote, "Change is unsettling when it is happening to me,

but it is exhilarating when I am making it happen." EDGE is a long-term initiative that will bring significant and positive changes to better support our current workforce. It will require collaboration across many teams, schools, departments and individuals to be successful.

To find out more about how you can get involved in maintaining momentum for this mission-critical work, talk to your manager and look for more News & Announcements on our My UT Health intranet, updates in the This Week email newsletter and the [EDGE initiative](#) Intranet site. Email questions or feedback about EDGE to [EDGE@uthscsa.edu](mailto:EDGE@uthscsa.edu).



The Mary Kay Foundation, a funding source for cancer research, is currently accepting applications for innovative grants for translational research in ovarian, uterine, breast, or cervical cancer.

The program will offer grants up to \$100,000 (combined direct and indirect costs - indirect costs cannot exceed 15%) that may be used in one year or up to two years. Applications must be submitted by one Principal Investigator, selected by the Institution. Grants are limited to the United States.

Only one grant application will be accepted from each invited cancer research institute or medical school. **No exceptions.**

The Principal Investigator that completes the applications must be a full-time Assistant Professor or higher at the time of application submission and the same person who signs

**APPLICATIONS ARE ACCEPTED FROM NOVEMBER 5, 2019, THROUGH FEBRUARY 7, 2020 (5:00 PM CT)**

the electronic signature. Names must match exactly. Staff scientists, postdoctoral trainees, and instructors are NOT eligible.

Announcement of the grant awards will be made on or about June 1, 2020.

The Principal Investigator will be notified following a review of the applications.

**The online application will ask applicants to submit the following:**

- Research Description (5 pages max)
- Literature References Cited (2 pages max)
- Letters of Collaboration (3 pages max)
- Current Financial Support (2 pages max)
- Budget and Justification
- NIH Format CV
- NIH Biosketch or Equivalent, (5 pages max, all in one attachment)

### MAYS CANCER CENTER HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

**THURSDAY 11.28.19 — OPEN (TREATMENTS ONLY)**

**FRIDAY 11.29.19 — CLOSED**

### PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERNAL BRAND SURVEY AND ENTER TO WIN AIRPODS



This survey provides a snapshot of UT Health San Antonio employees' perceptions and feelings about the organization. It can remain anonymous, or you may enter your name for a chance to win AirPods.

[CLICK HERE](#)



### Join us for an employee appreciation Holiday Luncheon and Welcome Celebration for Dr. Daruka Mahadevan and Dr. Mark Bonnen.

**Friday, December 13th  
Mabee Conference Room (G406)  
11:30am – 1:00pm**

Wear your favorite holiday themed attire – cute or funny, but work-appropriate.