

FINDINGS

2018 SPRING/SUMMER NEWSLETTER

NCLC Honors Drs. Freifeld and Cowan at 16th Annual Tribute Luncheon

One of UNMC's most dynamic couples – Ken Cowan, M.D., Ph.D., and Alison Freifeld, M.D. – received the annual Lifesaver Award on April 30 at the 16th Annual Spring Tribute Luncheon for the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures at Happy Hollow Club.



Left to right, Dr. Harold Maurer, Beverly Maurer, Dr. Alison Freifeld, Dr. Ken Cowan

The award is given each year by the Coalition to recognize individuals who have made a difference in the world through their passionate support of medical research.

David Crouse, Ph.D. emeritus professor at UNMC and president of the Coalition, presented the Lifesaver Award.

The couple moved to Omaha in 1999. Dr. Cowan is director of the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center and the Eppley Institute, while Dr. Freifeld is professor of internal medicine and director of the section of oncology infectious diseases.

With the Buffett Cancer Center celebrating its first year of operation, Dr. Cowan has played a prominent role in taking the medical center's cancer program to the next level.

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Dr. Mott recognized with Maurer Scientific Achievement Award

Tom O'Connor, UNMC Today
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It's a form of cancer that's every bit as deadly as pancreatic cancer – just not as common. It's called cholangiocarcinoma, a cancer of the bile ducts that extend from the liver to the small intestine.



Dr. Justin Mott

For the research team of Justin Mott, M.D., Ph.D., which includes a researcher and three graduate research assistants,

cholangiocarcinoma has become their archenemy.

"It's a weird tumor that's understudied and needs attention," said Dr. Mott, who is associate professor and medical assistant director of biochemistry and molecular biology. "There are less than a dozen labs with a major focus on this cancer."

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NCLC Honors Drs. Freifeld and Cowan at 16th Annual Tribute Luncheon (continued)

He hopes the \$323 million Buffett Cancer Center – the largest public-private partnership in the history of the University of Nebraska – will provide the impetus to allow the medical center to become a comprehensive cancer center, the highest level designated by the National Cancer Institute. Only 49 cancer centers around the country currently hold the comprehensive cancer center designation.

“Ken has a unique quality – he’s a very empathetic physician,” said UNMC Chancellor Emeritus Harold M. Maurer, M.D., who recruited Dr. Cowan from the National Cancer Institute. “He gives his personal cell phone and email address to patients.

“When I was chancellor and asked him about a patient, he would always say, ‘I’ll take care of it.’ That’s the kind of physician he is.”

Dr. Freifeld has implemented and led several programs focused on managing infections in cancer and



Dr. Ken Cowan & Dr. Alison Freifeld

organ transplant patients. She created the UNMC Travel Health Clinic, which protects students and faculty traveling for research or study abroad by ensuring they are up to date on immunizations.

She also has a leadership role in global health initiatives at UNMC

which are aimed at creating medical research and health education collaborations between UNMC and international partners. Most recently, she has been working with the Rwandan government to develop opportunities for bi-directional exchange experiences for students and residents.

Mark Rupp, M.D., professor of internal medicine and chief of the division of infectious diseases, called Dr. Freifeld “a globally-recognized authority on how to best treat patients with infectious complications due to immunosuppressive cancer therapy.”

“The award reflects a career of work that Dr. Freifeld has had at UNMC dedicated toward caring for immune-compromised cancer patients,” Dr. Rupp said.

Coalition brings Dr. Leigh Turner to Nebraska as part of NE SCIFEST

Dr. Leigh Turner, an expert in the area of legal and ethical concerns surrounding unproven cell-based interventions, was the featured speaker for the 2018 Lunch and Learn, Friday, April 27 as part of the Nebraska Science Festival.



Dr. Leigh Turner

Dr. Turner’s presentation addressed the ethical and legal issues around businesses selling unproven

and unlicensed cell-based interventions.

More than 50 people attended the free event warning the audience regarding advertising

tactics by businesses and the lack of evidence of success in the cell-based medical procedures.

“The problem is not with the person, the problem is with the business that’s giving them misleading and inaccurate [information] and sometimes we can raise the question, is it fraudulent?” Turner said. “It’s easy to dupe people. The more difficult the circumstances for the patient, the more it’s easier to take advantage and prey on them.”

Dr. Mott recognized with Maurer Scientific Achievement Award (continued)

For his research on this rare form of cancer, Dr. Mott received the Chancellor Emeritus Harold M. Maurer, M.D. and Beverly Maurer Scientific Achievement Award on April 30 at the 16th Annual Spring Tribute Luncheon for the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures at Happy Hollow Club.

The major function of the bile ducts is to move a fluid called bile from the liver and gallbladder to the small intestine, where the bile helps digest the fats in food.

The average survival time for someone with cholangiocarcinoma is 8-12 months. About five percent of patients make it five years. Among the notables who have succumbed to the disease are Walter Payton,

former NFL great, and Chris LeDoux, country music singer/songwriter.

"We recently got a visit from a young cholangiocarcinoma patient and her family," Dr. Mott said. "They were driven by curiosity to speak with researchers studying the disease. For these patients and their families, they want hope for future treatments."

Dr. Mott has a five-year, \$1.7 million grant from the National Cancer Institute to study cholangiocarcinoma. His team is trying to determine why bile, which is normally toxic to other cells, seems to increase the tumor's ability to grow and survive.

The tumor cells appear to have protective proteins that are turned on by growth factors. Dr. Mott's team is trying to identify a drug target that will allow them to "undercut this defense system."

Dr. Mott earned his M.D. and Ph.D. degrees at St. Louis University. He

joined UNMC in 2011. Since that time, he has published 18 manuscripts and a book chapter and received an Outstanding Teacher Award in 2017.

His nominator, Surinder Batra, Ph.D., professor and chair of biochemistry and molecular biology, ranks Dr. Mott "among the top translational scientists in his age group."

"He is a force in the field of gastrointestinal cancers," Dr. Batra said. "The work he is doing will have long-lasting impacts on cancer research, cancer initiation and progression, chemo-resistance, various treatments and prevention."

Previous Honorees Maurer Scientific Achievement Award

2015 - David Mercer, M.D., Ph.D.

2016 - Tammy Kielian, Ph.D.

2017 - Rebecca Oberley-Deegan, Ph.D.

2018 - Justin Mott, M.D., Ph.D.

As with anything, Dr. Turner said, it's important to do your homework. In doing so, Turner said you'll discover the loopholes and gray areas of the clinics and their cell-based medical procedures.

"There's the possibility of false advertising claims that someone is paying thousands or tens of thousands of dollars for something that's packaged as a stem cell treatment but in fact it's not a stem cell product at all,"

Turner said. "Or maybe there are some stem cells in there but there's no meaningful notion of a dose. Or it's put into the person by someone who's not qualified, who has no background in stem cell research. It could be someone who has little or no clinical experience. That's when bad things can happen to people."

The pressure to change these false practices rests on lawmakers and state medical boards, Turner said.

"The FDA needs to play a more active role in policing this marketplace and investigating businesses that are marketing. I think there's a role for the Federal Trade Commission. You shouldn't be able to say whatever you want just to sell a product and make money from people. There's a role for state medical boards."

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2018 WINTER NEWSLETTER

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