



Monday, March 25, 2002

Legendary cancer researcher visits OU

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

One of the leading researchers in the fight against cancer visited Oakland University last week, giving OU students, faculty and staff, and the OU community a rare opportunity to learn from this legendary researcher.

Dr. Judah Folkman, who developed the theory that cancer could be controlled by cutting off blood supplies to tumors, which has been called perhaps the most significant advance in the last 50 years in the fight against cancer, spoke to an audience of OU students, faculty and other medical researchers at Dodge Hall March 21.

"This was a great and rare opportunity to see him lecture in person," said Burton Ellis, a diagnostic radiologist from William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. "Someone of his stature is highly sought after. He's internationally known for his research. It's very impressive that Oakland University was able to bring him here."

Folkman is a Harvard professor and director of the Surgical Research Laboratory at Children's Hospital in Boston. He founded the field of angiogenesis research, which is the study of blood vessel development. His research has focused on how cancerous tumors spur the development of new blood vessels that they require for growth.

Folkman's lecture, titled "Angiogenesis Research: From Laboratory to Clinic," indicated that cancerous tumors are angiogenesis-dependant. Recently, he said, the drug Endostatin, a natural antiangiogenic protein, has been shown to inhibit the growth of blood vessels, thereby starving cancerous tumors.

"Endostatin targets tumor vessels and not normal vessels in laboratory mice," Folkman said. "This angiogenesis inhibitor has also been used in clinical trials to treat eye disease. Endostatin is one of the most non-toxic drugs that exist. In fact, Down's Syndrome patients have abnormally high levels of Endostatin and have a decreased incidence of solid tumors, including prostate cancer. And unlike traditional chemotherapy, the tumors show no resistance to Endostatin over time following repeated administration."

To illustrate the effectiveness of this drug, Folkman showed slides of several terminally ill children and adults who had large cancerous tumors, and in each case following administration of Endostatin, the tumors slowly disappeared and the patients fully recovered.

"I attend quite a number of clinical lectures, but this one was outstanding," said Henry Shevitz, who practices internal medicine privately in Southfield. "It's one of the most exciting lectures I've ever gone to. Folkman's research is going to have a major impact. It's as close to curing cancer as we've ever come."

Though his theories initially drew skepticism, Folkman's research is now hailed as one of the most important cancer discoveries of the last 50 years. He and his research have been the subject of a "Time Magazine" cover story, an episode of the PBS series "NOVA," and features on ABC News and National Public Radio. His work also has been chronicled in many other publications such as the "Journal of the National Cancer Institute," the "New York Times" and "Scientific American."

For his revolutionary work, OU's **Center for Biomedical Research** awarded Folkman with the OU Distinguished Biomedical Science Achievement Award. Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost Virinder Moudgil presented the award to Folkman.

Folkman's lecture was sponsored by Biotherapies Inc., the College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Programs Fund, King Pharmaceuticals, William Beaumont Hospital, Vectech Pharmaceutical Consultants Inc., the Michigan Biosciences Industry Association, Oakland County Medical Society and the Wayne County Medical Society.

SUMMARY

One of the leading researchers in the fight against cancer visited Oakland University last week, giving OU students, faculty and staff, and the OU community a rare opportunity to learn from this legendary researcher. Dr. Judah Folkman, who developed the theory that cancer could be controlled by cutting off blood supplies to tumors spoke to an audience of OU students, faculty and other medical researchers at Dodge Hall March 21.

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