

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Medical News

Public Affairs and Media Relations
614-293-3737



Media Contact:

Amanda Harper, OSUCCC – James
Office: 614-685-5420
Amanda.Harper2@osumc.edu

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Pelotonia Institute for Immuno-Oncology Launched at Ohio State with \$102,265,000 Investment

Financial pledge from Pelotonia represents one of the largest gifts ever to The Ohio State University and honors the 2,265 riders who participated in the inaugural ride in 2009.

COLUMBUS – [The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center – Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute](#) (OSUCCC – James) today announced formation of the Pelotonia Institute for Immuno-Oncology (PIIO), a comprehensive bench-to-bedside research initiative focused on harnessing the body's immune system to fight cancer at all levels—from prevention to treatment and survivorship.

[Pelotonia](#), a grassroots cycling event that has raised more than \$190 million for cancer research initiatives at the OSUCCC – James has pledged more than \$102 million over the next five years. The largest portion of the pledge – \$65 million – will directly fund the PIIO, with the remaining dollars continuing to support well established initiatives such as Pelotonia Fellowships, Idea Grants, statewide research initiatives and equipment. The OSUCCC – James is also supporting the PIIO with a \$35 million commitment to grow and sustain modern research infrastructure.

Zihai Li, MD, PhD, a physician scientist and elected member of American Society for Clinical Investigation (ASCI) and Association of American Physicians (AAP), has been recruited to lead the new institute. Li joins Ohio State from the Medical University of South Carolina Hollings Cancer Center, where he served as the Sally Abney Rose Endowed Chair in Stem Cell Biology & Therapy, co-leader of the Cancer Immunology program and as chair of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology.

The OSUCCC – James expects to add up to 32 additional faculty over the next five years to work within the PIIO. Multi-phase laboratory renovations will take place during this time to create advanced cellular laboratory facilities, immune monitoring and discovery platforms, immunogenomics, systems immunology, and other research areas for start-up initiatives and national collaborations with other academic centers and industry

partners. Li's appointment as the founding director of the PIIO will help Ohio State build upon the already strong endeavors in immunotherapy, which is widely considered to be the next frontier in cancer treatment.

"Building this institute is a bold, forward-thinking leap that we expect to move the mark on drug discoveries in immuno-oncology in a significant way," says OSUCCC Director [Raphael Pollock](#), MD, PhD. "This effort will allow us to make fundamental discoveries to develop next generation immuno-oncology agents, expand existing cellular therapy research facilities, offer pilot funding for new research projects and training opportunities for students and junior faculty."

"In 2009, 2,265 riders showed up for the inaugural Pelotonia ride. They believed in the potential of this community and we honor their vision and dedication. Today, we are thrilled to make this transformational commitment to an area of research with such profound promise – immuno-oncology," said Doug Ulman, President and CEO of Pelotonia. "We hope that this pledge inspires our community to do what they do best – to go above and beyond to achieve something that none of us could do on our own."

This initiative will continue to leverage the innovative and collaborative work of scientists from both the OSUCCC – James and [Nationwide Children's Hospital](#).

The institute adds to the existing track record of success in cancer research, prevention and care at central and southern Ohio's only [National Cancer Institute](#) (NCI)-designated comprehensive cancer center.

"The OSUCCC – James is a pillar of strength at Ohio State and in our community. Through the cancer center, we conduct multi-disciplinary research spanning medicine, engineering, food science, public health and other disciplines in the health sciences. This transformative gift will allow for an entirely new level of collaboration, research and discovery at our university – a level only possible at a comprehensive institution like Ohio State," said President Michael V. Drake, MD.

About Zihai Li

An internationally recognized authority in immuno-oncology and physician scientist, Li brings an established track record of immuno-oncology discoveries and sustained research funding, including a National Cancer Institute (NCI) program project grant and four multi-year National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded projects.

Under his leadership, Li's research team has made seminal contributions to understanding the immunological properties of heat shock proteins in cancer immunotherapy and immune tolerance. His current research is focused on developing better immunotherapeutics against cancer by reprogramming the tumor microenvironment to enhance tumor recognition and elimination by the immune system.

In his new role at the OSUCCC – James, Li is responsible for building and implementing a strategic plan for research programs within the PIIO that will focus on cutting-edge cellular therapies, immunogenomics and next-generation immunotherapies. This includes projects aimed at understanding how cancer develops and methods of preventing and treating it through immune mechanisms. PIIO teams will also investigate ways to reduce complications from new immunotherapies and enhance survivorship.

“I am excited and humbled to join OSUCCC's great tradition of academic excellence and innovation,” said Li. “I look forward to working with the outstanding Ohio State community to advance cancer immunotherapy as an imperative pillar for cancer cure.”

To learn more about immuno-oncology at the OSUCCC – James, visit cancer.osu.edu/PIIO.

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About the OSUCCC – James

The OSUCCC – James strives to create a cancer-free world by integrating scientific research with excellence in education and patient-centered care, a strategy that leads to better methods of prevention, detection and treatment. Ohio State is one of only 50 National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated Comprehensive Cancer Centers and one of only a few centers funded by the NCI to conduct phase I, II and III clinical trials on novel anticancer drugs. As the cancer program's 344-bed adult patient-care component, The James is one of the top cancer hospitals in the nation as ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* and has achieved Magnet® designation, the highest honor an organization can receive for quality patient care and professional nursing practice. At 21 floors and with more than 1.1 million square feet, The James is a transformational facility that fosters collaboration and integration of cancer research and clinical cancer care. For more information, visit cancer.osu.edu.