Real Stories

Through our new “Real Stories” series, you can get to know the real people behind the discoveries and donations at the Cancer Research Institute.

We profile everyone from notable scientists and generous donors to courageous patients and dedicated trustees and staff. They are but a few of the millions of people around the world who are trying to make a difference in the battle against cancer — in laboratories and hospitals, corporate boardrooms, and in their everyday lives.

We hope you enjoy “Real Stories,” especially if you are one of the donors who have made these breakthroughs and new hope possible. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Researcher profile: Dr. Ian Frazer

His discoveries led to the HPV vaccine that protects women from this virus that can cause cervical cancer. He was named 2006 “Australian of the Year” and was joint winner of the CRI’s prestigious William B. Coley Award for Distinguished Research in Basic and Tumor Immunology.

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Researcher Profile: Dr. Xingxing Zang

Postdoctoral fellow at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

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Researcher profile: Dr. Jonathan Cebon

CRI-funded CVC clinical investigator Dr. Jonathan Cebon is Director of the Joint Austin/Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research Medical Oncology Unit at Austin Hospital in Melbourne, Australia.

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Trustee profile: Geoffrey O. Coley

“We need to speed up the advancement of new vaccines and therapies so we can begin to treat real patients now.”

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Patient Profile: Christine Sable
Q&A with ovarian cancer survivor and CVC clinical trial participant.
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Patient profile: Tim Stobo
Q&A with melanoma survivor and CVC clinical trial participant.
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Trustee profile: Robert J. Appel
Bringing a wealth of experience in the financial industry and in stewarding philanthropic institutions...
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Real Stories: Dr. Xingxing Zang

Researcher profile: Dr. Xingxing Zang, former CRI postdoctoral fellow (2002-2005)

Dr. Zang received postdoctoral fellowship support from CRI to fund his postgraduate training under the tutelage of CRI Scientific Advisory Council Associate Director James P. Allison, Ph.D., at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. His research into immune cell recognition and activation has revealed a new class of molecular markers. His discovery may lead to new screening tests for ovarian and prostate cancers.

“It’s gratifying to see how my basic research will have real-life application in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.”

The passion that Dr. Xingxing Zang feels for his work is palpable. He is on a quest that’s taken him from his home in the rural countryside of Chegian, China, to the laboratory of one of the world’s foremost immunologists, CRI Scientific Advisory Council Associate Director Dr. James Allison at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City.

Using genome technology to address questions in immunology, Dr. Zang’s rigorous, methodical, molecule-by-molecule search of the whole human and mouse genome has led to the discovery of B7x. “We find that ovarian and prostate cancer cells overexpress B7x,” Dr. Zang says. “These cancers use the B7x molecule to shut down the immune system just enough to let the cancer grow.”

Dr. Zang now wants to find ways to stop B7x from disarming the immune system. “We’re looking for the B7x receptor. Knowing where the receptor is and what it looks like will allow us to prevent B7x from binding to it, neutralizing its harmful effects.”

But blocking B7x is only half the story. In clinical tests, Dr. Zang’s team found a soluble form of B7x in the blood samples of both ovarian and prostate cancer patients. “This is almost as important as finding B7x on the tumor cells,” he explains. “If we can learn how and when B7x enters the blood, we may be able to develop a biomarker screening test for early detection of these cancers.”

As a CRI-funded postdoctoral fellow Dr. Zang’s work has already yielded enormous promise. As he puts it, “I am very lucky to work in this lab with a great team, and to be guided by Dr. Allison. It’s gratifying to see how my basic research will have real life application in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.”

Dr. Zang has now accepted a position as an assistant professor at ????