

The Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation

Our mission is to eradicate mesothelioma as a life-ending disease.



BREATH OF HOPE

FALL 2004

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Message from the Executive Director



MARF is progressing, with the help of so many of you, in our mission to spur the needed research and cure mesothelioma. With this second issue of *Breath of Hope*, there is indeed much hope to share.

First, we introduce two new members of our Board of Directors, Ann Abbe and Dr. Ulf Jungnelius, who will help us greatly in this mission. In Chapter Chatter, we report on important contributions by the growing MARF volunteer network. Dr. Vogelzang gives us an exciting preview of MARF's First International Symposium on Malignant Mesothelioma. The Symposium is a key step forward in our plan to promote research and elevate understanding of the disease, while uniting and supporting the mesothelioma community. This has taken an immense amount of work, and we are

looking forward to a stellar meeting. I very much look forward to seeing you there!

Of course, the centerpiece of all our work is supporting the research necessary to cure mesothelioma. The Focus on Research section highlights recent progress of our grant program. And as I write this, we are just completing initial processing of the applications for our 2004 round. We received 31 grant applications, building on the success of 2003 by 25%! This again confirms MARF's central point that there are many dedicated researchers with brilliant ideas willing to invest their efforts on developing mesothelioma treatments. It is a question of allocating the resources needed to support them.

I thank you for your continued support.

Christopher E. Hahn

MARF Welcomes New Board Members

MARF's effectiveness in accomplishing its mission begins with its Board of Directors. Two fantastic new members bring to the Board further strength, expertise and passion.

Ann Abbe has been a nonprofit professional for 27 years, and is the Managing Partner of the Dallas-Ft. Worth office of SkyStone Ryan, a leading nonprofit consulting firm. She is an expert in fundraising and helping nonprofits reach their highest potential through strategic planning and effective organization. She brings to MARF all of this professional expertise, and also a personal passion for MARF and our

mission. Ann knows first-hand the urgency of the need to eradicate mesothelioma, for she lost her brother Mike Melton to the disease just under a year ago. As a volunteer, Ann has already been hugely helpful to MARF, and we are so grateful that she has now joined our Board.



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**TOGETHER
WE CAN
MAKE A
DIFFERENCE!**

**BELIEVE
IN A CURE**

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Focus On Research

DEDICATED
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IT IS A QUESTION OF
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YOU CAN HELP.
WWW.MARF.ORG

Researchers have been looking into gene therapy as a way to win the fight against cancer for many years. In theory, the principle is simple. Since tumors arise from cells that have acquired mutations in their genes, inserting a “good” version of the mutated gene should fix the problem. Another strategy would be to insert an altered “suicide” gene designed to cause the tumor cell to produce toxic material and so kill itself.

Unfortunately, neither approach is so simple. A few obstacles need to be overcome before the full potential of gene therapy reaches patients in the clinic. The first problem is delivering enough of the target gene, i.e. either the “good” gene or the “suicide” gene, into the tumor cells. The second major hurdle is specificity; delivering the gene to only the tumor cells and not the surrounding normal cells.

Dr. David T. Curiel at the University of Alabama at Birmingham is quite familiar with these obstacles, as he has spent much of his career optimizing gene therapy delivery strategies. Current methods of gene delivery rely on a type of virus called an Adenovirus. This virus is modified to contain the target gene, and when the virus infects a tumor cell, the gene is transferred into the tumor cell.

Dr. Curiel’s research focuses on how to improve the infectivity of the Adenovirus to maximize transfer of the target gene specifically into the tumor cells. So far, his results look very promising. With novel modifications to the proteins on the surface of the Adenovirus, Dr. Curiel was able to increase target gene delivery (infection) by 3-4 orders of magnitude in human tumor cells. Based on these results, MARF has awarded Dr. Curiel a research grant to investigate using his modified Adenovirus to specifically kill mesothelioma cells. There are indications that mesothelioma cells should be particularly susceptible to this type of gene therapy. If the investigation yields positive results, Dr. Curiel anticipates using the modified Adenovirus in clinical trials with mesothelioma patients.

Normally, chemotherapeutic agents cause a complex set of reactions, called programmed cell death or apoptosis, that ultimately results in cell death. But

this death pathway is not initiated in mesothelioma tumors, which allows these tumors to survive high doses of chemotherapy.



Dr. Gavin J. Gordon at Harvard/Brigham and Women’s Hospital has discovered that mesothelioma tumors have very high levels of a protein which prevents programmed cell death, called IAP-1 (inhibitor of apoptosis-1). Dr. Gordon has demonstrated that when the level of IAP-1 protein was decreased, mesothelioma cells were much easier to kill with conventional chemotherapies, such as cisplatin.

Based on these exciting findings, MARF is funding Dr. Gordon to investigate how targeting the IAP-1 gene (and perhaps other related genes) could be exploited to treat mesothelioma. Dr. Gordon is using a new technology called siRNA (small interfering RNA). siRNA molecules prevent the expression of specific proteins, and show great promise in cancer research. Dr. Gordon hopes that by utilizing this new siRNA technology to decrease expression of IAP-1 in mesothelioma cells, they will be much more sensitive to death by chemotherapy. This has the potential for rapid translation to effective treatment, since it could utilize chemotherapy drugs which have already been developed, like cisplatin.

These are two examples of the promising mesothelioma research projects that are going forward because of MARF’s research grant funding. They confirm MARF’s belief that the ways to defeat mesothelioma are there, waiting to be found; it is a question of allocating the resources.

Alvin Rehbeck Memorial Grant

Tim Rehbeck, his brother Thomas and sister Madelynn have donated \$100,000 from a legal settlement they received to fund a grant in honor of their father. Our thanks go to Tim and his family, and all our generous donors, who make possible MARF’s search for a cure.

First International Symposium On Malignant Mesothelioma

By Dr. Nicholas Vogelzang - Director, Nevada Cancer Institute and Member, MARF Board of Directors

It is my pleasure, as Co-Chair with Dr. Harvey Pass, to announce the First International Symposium on Malignant Mesothelioma, at the Las Vegas MGM Grand Hotel, October 14 - 16. Developing this first of what will now become an annual symposium has been a huge and exciting undertaking. This is an important step forward in our mission and we have been working hard to perfect all the details. (If you have not yet received the Program Announcement, please contact the MARF office.)

The Symposium is uniquely designed to educate and strengthen the entire mesothelioma-concerned community, by bringing together specialized clinicians and scientists, community physicians, patients, family members caring for or who may have lost a loved one, advocates and volunteers, and government, business and union leaders.

The first of the 3 days is oriented toward all non-medical or non-scientific experts. General issues regarding the effort to eradicate mesothelioma will be discussed, followed by highly specific clinical, social/emotional, and pain management presentations directly applicable to patients and

families, and to those involved with helping them. There will also be a special tribute ceremony honoring and remembering those we have lost to this disease.

Days two and three constitute the Scientific Meeting. Some of the world's foremost mesothelioma experts will present the latest developments in understanding and treating the disease. While this is aimed at medical professionals, it will be fascinating for all attendees. In fact, each day after the scientific sessions patients and family members will have two hours with the presenters to follow up with their own questions.

Finally, a delightful evening is in store for all attendees at Friday's Gala Reception and Dinner, featuring a talk and music by Jordan Zevon, presentation of the Congressman Bruce Vento Hope Builder Award to Senator Patty Murray, individual acknowledgement and recognition of each patient in attendance, and the Keynote Speech by the Honorable Harry Reid, Senator from Nevada.

We hope you can join us.

Chapter Chatter - MARF's Volunteer Network

We are excited that the First International Symposium on Malignant Mesothelioma will include an excellent turn-out by many of the world's top mesothelioma experts. It is also very important that community-based thoracic surgeons, pulmonologists, and oncologists know about the Symposium and attend, so they can be better educated on mesothelioma diagnosis and treatment options. Therefore, a great deal of thanks goes to the dozens of MARF volunteers all over the country who are literally pounding the pavement seeking out these "front-line" medical professionals to inform them about the Symposium and encourage them to attend.

Bob Good lost both his sister, Betty Jane, and brother-in-law, Terry, to mesothelioma last year. With his wife, Susan, and his two daughters, Camille and Emily, Bob embarked on an eight day bicycle trip across the heartland of New York State from Buffalo to Albany. They rode over 400 miles along

the historic and scenic Erie Canal. Through their efforts the Good family raised awareness about mesothelioma and over \$1,000 for research.

Trail blazers Nancy Buszinski and Alice Steigerwald of the very first MARF chapter, in Pittsburgh, are gearing up for their 3rd Annual Dance for Meso, which promises to be a great deal of fun. In addition to pioneering the first MARF chapter, Nancy and Alice were responsible for the very first Mesothelioma Awareness Day anywhere in the country. On September 26, 2003 the Pittsburgh City Council acknowledged this by proclaiming this date Mesothelioma Awareness Day in the City of Pittsburgh. Nancy and Alice we salute you!

Help get the word out in your community. Contact your city council or local government and find out how you can get them to recognize a Mesothelioma Awareness Day.

VOLUNTEERS MAKE
A DIFFERENCE
EVERY DAY!



Alice Steigerwald and Nancy Buszinski: MARF volunteers and organizers of the Dance for Meso.

The Mesothelioma Applied
Research Foundation

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Board Members, *continued*

Dr. Ulf Jungnelius is the Executive Director of Oncology Clinical Development for Pfizer Inc. He brings MARF his expertise as a medical and radiation oncologist, and his experience in pharmaceutical drug development and cancer research (Pfizer's drug Celebrex is now being studied in mesothelioma). As an executive of one of the largest companies in the U.S., he adds a key piece to MARF's effort to engage America's corporations in the mission to eradicate mesothelioma.



Welcome aboard, Ann and Dr. Jungnelius!

Tributes Update

A few weeks ago we sent requests for Tributes to all the patients and family members listed in our database. We are currently processing these photos and statements to include them on the MARF Tributes Page as a way of remembering and honoring those who have served and built their country, cared for their families, and battled this disease courageously.

In addition to making them part of our online Tributes Page we would like to include these photos and statements in a remembrance ceremony at the upcoming Mesothelioma Symposium. Jordan Zevon, son of legendary singer/songwriter Warren Zevon who died of mesothelioma last year, will do a special musical performance that will also feature these tributes.

If you would like to submit a tribute please contact the MARF office for details.