We are back with our 4th edition, and this one, we hope you will find, is an expanded edition to cover a number of compelling stories about recent events here at the Cancer Center.

One 2016 highlight concerns our recent Training Grant application (or “T32”) that, I imagine, supported some of you during your training here. This grant, continuously funded by the NCI for a remarkable 40 years, supports 10 of our postdoctoral fellows by providing full salary coverage, benefits, and even a bit of “extra” money for travel and equipment. In preparation for writing our renewal, I served on the review panel that reviews them, and I can attest that these grants are ridiculously competitive, even for old timers like ours. Our renewal totaled 389 pages, with over 100 of those pages dedicated to detailed and, to be honest, numbing data tables. After all this, we were delighted that we received a perfect score of 10 on our first submission—this score means that every member of the study section gave it the best score possible...in essence, a thing as rare as the elusive Northern Hairy-Nosed Wombat.

It may seem arrogant that I’m so boastful about this, but that’s not my intent. These grants, unlike most research grants that are based on the promise of future work, are scored based on the quality of trainees that an institution supported during its last funding cycle. That is to say: we got a perfect score because the reviewers were so impressed with the productivity, cancer focus, and diversity of our trainees. They are wise reviewers indeed.

While we believe that Fox Chase provides a rich training environment, the program would fail if our trainees were not truly world-class scientists. No worries on that count: the quality and innovation of the research done by all of our trainees, postdocs and grad students alike, is readily apparent. What was particularly gratifying was that some reviewers noted how supportive our postdoctoral trainees are of each other, and of those who are earlier in their careers, including undergraduates and high school kids. I am sincerely confident that our alums will make tremendous contributions to cancer research, and—as always—I invite you to visit us and see for yourself.

Glenn F. Rall, Ph.D.
Director, Postdoctoral Program

In the spotlight
In this section we highlight the El-Deiry lab, their training environment and what makes this translational drug discovery lab tick

Have you heard?
Read about the exciting stories from the Postdoctoral Association in 2016, including the new Graduate Student and Postdoc Affairs Office, the Spotlight feature, the expanding teaching and community outreach opportunities and a bit of fun.

Looking forward
We want to grow the Fox Chase Cancer Center Postdoctoral Association professional network. Read about how to reconnect with us!

The Postdoc Alumni Newsletter is published twice a year by the Academic Affairs Office for current and former trainees of Fox Chase Cancer Center.

Dr. J. Robert Beck
Chief Academic and Administrative Officer

Dr. Glenn F. Rall
Associate Chief Academic Officer

Dr. Amanda K. Purdy
Manager of Academic Programs and Training

Robin Wertz
Executive Assistant
In the Spotlight: The Wafik El-Deiry Lab

When you walk into the El-Deiry lab you can feel it: the weight of powerful stuff being done under the umbrella of an energetic, collaborative, and generally happy team. In some ways, this is what many trainees crave: good science in a harmonious environment. But: how was this achieved? Was it the mentor or the people? Was it the questions being asked or something else entirely? To figure out what makes this lab—the biggest at the Cancer Center—tick, we bribed them with pizza to give us a peek behind the curtain. Here’s what we learned.

1 The El-Deiry lab works hard—with each trainee averaging >50 hrs/week—working nights and weekends to ensure that the experiments keep on rolling (and access to sought-after equipment is available!). They are a cohesive team that balances hard work with a fun, supportive environment where desserts are made for everyone’s birthday (even Poop Emoji cakes are welcome), gifts are exchanged at Wafik’s annual White Elephant party, food potlucks are numerous and Trainee accolades (papers, journal covers and posters) are tweeted and permanently displayed for all visitors to see (see examples below and on the next page).

2 Beyond being a hard-working group, they are a community of current and former trainees where mentorship continues beyond the training period. This El-Deiry Community is especially evident at conferences: for example, they were tied for first place for the largest number of abstracts submitted to AACR in 2016. Moreover, mentorship is a critical component of their jobs (it’s part of their annual performance evaluations) and it flows between current and former trainees, among senior and junior members of the lab, and with the community.

3 Diversity, diversity, diversity: They are a diverse crew in every possible way: job title, country of origin (from 5 continents and counting!), training background and expertise. Beyond sharing diverse traditions and celebrations, the wide-ranging experience and expertise of the lab members ensures that fresh ideas are brought to every project. David Dicker, the longtime El-Deiry Laboratory Manager, keeps a world map at his desk that chronicles where lab members have come from.

“Alumni events help me connect with former trainees who have worked on earlier aspects of my project”
Shuai Zhao

“The diversity of the lab is not a conscious choice; it’s organic.”
Dave Dicker

“The different cultures provide unique approaches to problem solving, and the different histories [of the lab members] help with perspectives.”
Liz Hernandez

“There’s never a break in the action...any time of day [or night], people are here, in the lab, working.”
Tali Lev

Top left, Lanlan Zhou and Shuai Zhao. Bottom left, Journal Covers displayed outside the El-Deiry lab. Right, Prashanth Gokare pictured with his birthday cake.

Top, The El-Deiry Community at AACR 2016. Bottom, Prashanth Gokare discusses lab techniques with visiting students from Philadelphia.

Journal Covers displayed outside the El-Deiry lab.
In the Spotlight

The El-Deiry lab is a translational drug discovery and development lab focused on defining cell death signaling pathways downstream of tumor suppressors (e.g., p53 and TRAIL) and using this knowledge to develop novel cancer therapeutic approaches. In 2014, the lab—containing five graduate students, three postdocs, and five senior scientists—moved from Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania to the join the Molecular Therapeutics Department at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Northeast Philadelphia. Read more about the lab here.

Poster announcement tweets for trainees, Marie Baumeister and Jessica Wagner at from AACR and ASCO conferences, respectively.

Wafik El-Deiry with his team in 2016. 

First author papers by trainees.
Have You Heard?

Trainee Affairs Office Gets a Facelift
Located in the heart of the West Building, the Trainee Affairs Office is not just the headquarters for graduate student and postdoc training and support; it is a permanent testament to the achievements of our trainees and our Outreach Programs. Taking a tour around the office, you’ll find the In the Spotlight feature decorating the South wall. This installation proudly highlights the recent publications of the Center’s researchers in training. In addition to this permanent display of the trainee’s biography and a graphical abstract of their work, this feature is promoted and archived online. Check out this month’s featured trainee on FoxChase.org and on Linkedin. To date, over fifteen trainees have been featured and this list is only set to grow!

Continuing our tour to the north, we find the Community Outreach Wall, which has photos from recent efforts of a dedicated group of the Center’s trainees who volunteered their time for tours and hands-on lab experiences for visiting students. For instance, this past March, thirty-three 8th grade students from the Julia Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School in Philadelphia descended upon the Cancer Center for a full day immersive experience. In addition to a tour of the Cancer Center and lunch with the Center’s trainees, the visiting students ran DNA and protein gels, performed enzymatic assays and seeded organoid matrices. Other visitors included students from Franklin Institute’s STEM Scholars program, Temple’s STEP Up program, and North Montgomery Technical Career Center’s Biotechnology program. In addition to the obvious value this offers to our visitors, hosting these events also provide crucial education opportunities and communication skills for our trainees.

The Hunt is on!
In June, we kicked off the 1st Annual Amazing Race-inspired Scavenger Hunt with the intention of educating new and old trainees alike about the Cancer Center. Three teams competed; they followed clues about the Center’s founding members (Where does Reimann’s statue, or at least his head, reside?), they located an old picture of Bea Mintz—a pioneering and much celebrated member of our faculty—which was faithfully guarded by the Center’s librarian, Beth Lewis, and they serenaded members of the Grants Office with enthusiastic rounds of Row Row Row Your Boat. The goals of this exercise—beyond the liberty to have fun on occasion—was to build connections and community among our fellows. We’re already plotting this year’s clues!

Teaching Opportunities 2.0
In an effort to prepare our trainees to be effective teachers and mentors in academia and beyond, Academic Affairs has expanded available teaching opportunities both at the high school level through the Teen Research Internship Program (TRIP) Initiative (a hands-on, active learning course for high school students motivated to explore their interests in science and medicine), and at the college level, through partnerships with Bryn Athyn (see below) and Chestnut Hill Colleges, as well as the University of Delaware. One new endeavor is providing the unique and exciting opportunity for select trainees to create their own course. Scheduled to launch in Spring 2017, Special Topics: The Cure—From Bench to Bedside is the brainchild of trainees from diverse programs across the Center including Cancer Biology, Blood Cell Development and Function, and Cancer Prevention and Control. The course focuses on how cancer therapies are developed and covers the scope of cancer research and prevention, with a particular emphasis on newly emerging approaches in immunotherapy. The opportunity to develop, teach, and receive input on a postdoc-developed course will provide invaluable experiences for those trainees wishing to have teaching as part of their careers.

New Faces: 2016
Jacqui Simonet joined Dr. Jeff Peterson’s lab in January, 2016. She received her Ph.D. from Dr. Jeffery Golden at the University of Pennsylvania.

Sijo Chemmannur received his Ph.D. from Dr. Samit Chattopadhyay at the National Center for Cell Science in Pune, India in 2014. He joined Dr. Dietmar Kappes’ lab in February 2016.

After receiving her Ph.D. in Dr. Vasily Studisky’s lab through collaboration with Rutgers University, Ekaterina Nizovtseva began her postdoctoral training in the same lab in May 2016.

Erin Tagai joined Dr. Suzanne Miller’s lab in June, 2016. She received her Ph.D. from Dr. Cheryl Holt at the University of Maryland in College Park.

After receiving her Ph.D. in Dr. Marc Lobell’s lab at Stony Brook University, Melissa Auerbach joined Dr. Carolyn Heckman’s lab to pursue her postdoctoral training in June 2016.

Alyssa Leystra is our newest trainee, having joined Dr. Marjie Clapper’s lab in August. She received her Ph.D. from Dr. Richard Halberg at the University of Madison, Wisconsin.

Highlighting Our Achievements

Fellowships, Papers and Awards
Yin-Ming Kuo from Andy Andrew’s lab received the Young Investigator Travel Award at Bith MSACL 2016. His work also was selected for a podium presentation.


Notable new jobs
Rachelle Kosoff, who trained with Sid Balachandran and Jon Chernoff, is now an Associate Research Scientist at Advaxis, Inc.
Looking forward

Pay us a visit!
We would love to show you around, and have you meet with some of our current trainees. Perhaps you want to give the Scavenger hunt a go? In fact, several alums have recently been back to the Center to discuss their careers and share their stories. If you’re going to be in Philly—or just haven’t been on campus in a while—reach out to us and we would be happy to schedule a visit. We think you’ll like what you see!

Contact us!
We want to stay in contact with you! Please drop us an email with your contact information, or send us an invitation on LinkedIn (Group – Fox Chase Cancer Center Trainee Association): we’re hoping to expand our database of former trainees to enable our current graduate students and postdocs to reach out for career advice or questions about particular fields, institutions or companies.

Help us make a difference!
Postdoctoral training is a formative time in one’s career: not quite independent, but no longer a student. This period is often marked with tremendous growth and development, but also substantial anxiety. To continue the rich training environment here at the Center, we created the Donor Wall and we now call on you, the alumni, to help. Every person donating $50 or more to the Postdoc program will be recognized with a plaque on the Donor Wall. Will you be the next name we add?

Donate Today!
There are two easy ways to donate to the Postdoc Association.

1) Online donations can be made at: http://www.foxchase.org/giving

2) Alternatively, donations can be made payable to FOX CHASE CANCER CENTER and mailed to:
   Fox Chase Cancer Center
   Attn: Academic Affairs
   333 Cottman Ave
   West Bldg 216
   Philadelphia, PA 19111

Liz Hernandez Borrero, a graduate student in Wafik El-Deiry’s lab, discusses her poster with faculty members, Jeffrey Peterson and Lori Rick, at this year’s Trainee Research Symposium.