In the March issue of the ECOG-ACRIN Newsletter, we bring immune-oncology (IO) to the fore, as well as a statement of purpose from the newly-appointed Chair of the Community Oncology Committee, Dr. Matthias Weiss. No one can doubt the impact of IO, which in the past five years has revolutionized the treatment of some of the more intractable cancers we confront. Essentially all the progress has resulted from targeting just two mechanisms responsible for failure of the immune system to eliminate cells that, by virtue of their altered peptide production, should be recognized as foreign, and so be eliminated. That antibodies to CTLA4, and to either PD1 or PDL1, can re-establish immune responses and shrink tumors is remarkable, especially when we consider the track records of previous treatments of melanoma, of lung cancers, and of urothelial malignancies.

At the same time, we have to recognize several aspects of this therapeutic beneficence: we are as yet unable to determine who will benefit from these therapies; while in many cases combined PD1/CTLA4 therapy is best, which patients benefit from the added risk of the combination? Which patients are most likely to suffer the most severe complications of these therapies? And which novel combinations are most appropriate for ECOG-ACRIN trials? To address these questions, we need to be able to interrogate tissues before and after treatment, and such are the stakes both for companies and for patients, most early-phase trials incorporate repeated biopsies, with the goal of defining these issues for the benefit of future patients.

For ECOG-ACRIN trials, this need was recognized many years ago, and a repository was established at MD Anderson under the leadership of Dr. Ignacio Wistuba. The excellence of this laboratory was recently recognized by an award of a Cancer Immune Monitoring and Analysis Center (CIMAC) grant through which these important correlative endpoints will be studied in ECOG-ACRIN trials. Dr. Wistuba outlines the capabilities of the laboratory, how it is integrated into the NCI-funded national effort in this area, and most importantly, how to access its expertise and services. As IO trials become less exploratory, and more integrated into standard care, so our trials need this kind of support to maximize their impact. Indeed, one of the successor trials to MATCH, called IO-MATCH, will be discussed at the forthcoming Boston meeting.

"As IO trials become less exploratory, and more integrated into standard care, so our trials need this kind of support to maximize their impact."

Dr. Weiss outlines a new approach to the Community Oncology Committee, recognizing the potential impact of new communications in bringing both doctors and patients into a zone of reliable information. This modernization has been led from both the community and NCORP sites in recent years, and the thoughtful efforts of Dr. Weiss as well as those of Dr. Michael Thompson are changing how we interact. We will continue to develop and expand these resources. The potential for more effective and informed patient engagement will result in higher quality research, and interactions with patients and advocates to open access to ECOG-ACRIN trials. Again, there will be more at the Community Cancer Committee Session at our Group Meeting in May, so please mark your calendar for Friday, May 3 from 7:30 – 9:30 AM.
NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE'S CIMAC-CIDC NETWORK BOLSTERS IMMUNOTHERAPY EFFORTS

IGNACIO I. WISTUBA, MD

The Cancer Immune Monitoring and Analysis Centers (CIMAC) and Cancer Immunologic Data Commons (CIDC) Network is an initiative of the National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Moonshot Program that provides cutting-edge technology and expertise in genomic, proteomic, and functional molecular analysis to enhance targeted immune therapies in cancer clinical trials. Established in 2017, the CIMAC-CIDC Network is supported by a five year, $55 million dollar grant from the NCI.

The CIMACs operate as the primary analysis centers of the network for correlative studies in clinical trials involving cancer immunotherapy, functioning as platforms for advanced molecular characterization of tumor and immune profiling using state-of-the-art analytically-validated and standardized platforms. Each CIMAC encompasses a multidisciplinary group with basic, translational, clinical, and computational research expertise that will support significant advancements in translational research. There are four CIMACs within the network, each contributing a level of experimental and analytical expertise to the mission. They are located at Stanford University, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

Each CIMAC is in a primary alignment with one to two clinical trial networks, but may also work outside their primary alignment in order to extend their unique assay capabilities to the entire network. Trial network partners are the Experimental Therapeutics Clinical Trials Network (ETCTN), Cancer Immunotherapy Trials Network (CITN), Pediatric Cancer Immunotherapy Trials Network (Ped-CITN), National Clinical Trials Network (NCTN), Adult Brain Tumor Consortium (ABTC), and Pediatric Brain Tumor Consortium (PBTC). Within the NCTN, MD Anderson CIMAC, led by Ignacio I. Wistuba, MD, is primarily assigned to coordinate the activities of the ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group.

The CIDC at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute integrates the bioinformatics needs of the network, optimizing data collection methodologies suitable for immune-related biomarkers, facilitating data integration, and building biomarker databases for future research by the larger immuno-oncology community. The CIDC also collaborates with the CIMACs to promote data standardization efforts, and to develop uniform analysis pipelines across the studies within the network and with public databases outside the network. To learn more about the CIMAC-CIDC Network, please visit cimac-network.org.

“We want to improve immune monitoring to better understand the mechanisms that lead tumors to respond to or resist treatment, so we can develop new, better strategies for patients.”
Dr. Weiss is the new Chair of ECOG-ACRIN’s Community Cancer Committee, succeeding Dr. Gary I. Cohen, MD. He serves as the oncology physician leader at ThedaCare Medical Oncology in Appleton, Wisconsin and specializes in hematology. Dr. Weiss will lead his first Community Cancer Committee Session at the upcoming Spring Group Meeting on Friday, May 3 from 7:30 – 9:30 AM.

Dear ECOG-ACRIN COMMUNITY members,

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as the ECOG-ACRIN Community Cancer Committee Chair, and hope to continue the excellent service provided by Dr. Gary Cohen.

The ECOG-ACRIN Group Meeting in Boston is just a few weeks away!

I am reaching out today to invite you to participate in a process of exploration regarding how leadership, principal investigators, and staff members of ECOG-ACRIN (EA) can connect with you, not only during our meetings in the spring and fall but throughout the year. Let us envision how active engagement, shared learning, and dynamic collaboration can enhance our collective experience as an EA COMMUNITY and improve upon our effectiveness in advancing scientific progress. Together, we shall consider developing a virtual EA communication platform that:

- engages a large pool of community members
- permits bi-directional exchange of information in real time
- facilitates direct communication between principal investigators, scientists, disease-specific committee members, and community site participants
- serves as a resource for learning opportunities and provides access to published best research practice principles
- offers convenient access from our mobile devices

There are already several excellent EA tools that can achieve components of this goal, specifically the website, the recently implemented newsletter, the Group Meeting app, and several social media accounts. On Friday, May 3, during the EA Community Cancer Committee Session, Diane Dragaud (EA Director of Communications), Katie Heller (EA Marketing Specialist), and Dr. Mike Thompson (EA NCORP Committee Chair) will present these tools and review their best use. I invite you to share your experiences utilizing these tools – and your ideas as to how we might implement a virtual communication platform – both at the meeting and by contacting me directly.

The meeting agenda on May 3 also includes brief presentations by several principal investigators about their recently opened EA clinical trials with time allocated for feedback.

I am looking forward to your active participation so that together, we can create an expanded ECOG-ACRIN COMMUNITY that can efficiently advance scientific progress and improve the care and outcomes of our patients.

Best wishes,

Matthias
NEWS IN BRIEF
Is something new or noteworthy happening at your institution? Send your updates to support@ecog-acrin.org and we will do our best to include them in an upcoming issue.

REMINDER: REGISTER FOR THE SPRING GROUP MEETING, MAY 2 – 4 IN BOSTON
Registration is open for the ECOG-ACRIN Spring Group Meeting, May 2 - 4 at the Boston Marriott Copley Place in Boston, MA. Connect with colleagues and learn the latest in basic, clinical, and translational research. Visit the meeting website to register, view the schedule, and more.

Upon registering, a confirmation email will be sent with a link to reserve your hotel room online. Rooms can also be reserved over the phone by calling (800) 228-9290 and requesting the ECOG-ACRIN room block. Rooms must be reserved by Thursday, April 4 to secure the discounted group rate of $279 plus applicable taxes per night.

The Meeting App will also be available soon. Those who have registered will receive an email once it is live. Questions? Email the Group Meeting Planners or call (215) 399-0440.

ECOG-ACRIN LEADERS ON THE MOVE
Matthias Weiss, MD, PhD of ThedaCare Medical Oncology in Wisconsin now chairs EA’s Community Cancer Committee. He succeeds Dr. Gary I. Cohen, MD in this role (see page 2 for more).

Bonnie Ky, MD, MSCE, Chair of EA’s Cardiotoxicity Subcommittee, will become Editor-in-Chief of JACC: CardioOncology, a new journal of the American College of Cardiology, launching in September 2019. Dr. Ky is an Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

Fadlo Khuri, MD, former EA Prevention Committee Chair, was recently appointed to serve a second five-year term as president of the American University of Beirut, effective September 1, 2020. Dr. Khuri chaired the Prevention Committee from 2012 – 2015 while at Emory University.

INTRODUCING GERIATRIC ONCOLOGY WORKING GROUP CHAIR EFRAT DOTAN, MD
Efrat Dotan, MD is now serving as chair of EA’s Geriatric Oncology Working Group, the newest component of the Health Equity Committee. Dr. Dotan is an associate professor in the Department of Hematology/Oncology at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia where she also directs the Hematology/Oncology Fellowship Training Program. Additionally, Dr. Dotan leads the National Comprehensive Cancer Network’s Older Adult Oncology Panel.

If you are interested in joining the Geriatric Oncology Working Group or would like to learn more, email Dr. Dotan.

If you are attending the upcoming Group Meeting, consider attending the Geriatric Working Group Session on Friday, May 3 from 2:30 – 3:30 PM.

TMIST TRIAL FEATURED IN THE CANCER LETTER
The TMIST breast cancer screening study was recently highlighted in The Cancer Letter. Read an in-depth Q&A with study chair Etta D. Pisano, MD for updates on this landmark study.

NCI-MATCH TRIAL UPDATE WEBINAR FOR PATIENT ADVOCATES
A recording of the MATCH trial update webinar for patient advocates held in early March is now available. Follow this link to access the full event, hosted by the NCI Office of Advocacy Relations and ECOG-ACRIN. Learn about the current pathway for patients to be referred to the trial by more than 20 testing labs, the status of the 39 treatment arms, demographics of participating patients, and how advocates can support the trial. The Q&A session answers many questions.

The webinar features three speakers: Alice P. Chen, MD (NCI Study Chair), Edith P. Mitchell, MD (ECOG-ACRIN Safety Co-Chair), and Mary Lou Smith, JD, MBA (ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Advocates Committee Chair and NCI-MATCH Patient Advocate Working Group Chair).