Emory University’s Suresh S. Ramalingam Honored as Young Investigator of the Year

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This year’s Young Investigator Award was presented to Suresh S. Ramalingam, MD, at the ECOG-ACRIN Spring 2013 Group Meeting earlier this month in Atlanta, GA. Dr. Ramalingam is Professor of Hematology and Medical Oncology, Emory University School of Medicine and Director, Division of Medical Oncology, Winship Cancer Institute in Atlanta. He is the current Therapeutic Chair of the Thoracic Committee of the ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group.

The Young Investigator Award is the ECOG Research and Education Foundation’s most prestigious honor. Established in 1999, the award recognizes a young physician recommended by his or her research mentors as an outstanding leader who has made substantial scientific and administrative contributions to the organization and to the field. Individuals who are younger than 46 years of age and work in institutions that are members of the ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group are eligible for nomination. Previous award recipients vote on the nominations.

The coincidence of this year’s meeting location being in the same city as Dr. Ramalingam’s home institution made it possible for his family to be present when Robert L. Comis, MD, Foundation President, made the surprise announcement at the General Session of the meeting.

A “Once-in-a-Lifetime” Research Leader

Dr. Ramalingam has been a member of ECOG since 2003. Within ECOG, he has taken the lead in the design, development, and implementation of clinical and translational studies in the area of thoracic malignancies. He was chosen Co-Chair of the ECOG Thoracic Committee in 2008—astonishingly, only 5 years after completion of his hematology-oncology fellowship training—and Chair of the ECOG Thoracic Committee in 2011.

Dr. Ramalingam, a national leader in lung cancer clinical investigation, is recognized for his pioneering efforts in the clinical development of histone deacetylase (HDAC), mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase (PARP), irreversible epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR), and heat shock protein inhibitors in thoracic malignancies. He led and published the results of a randomized phase II study of vorinostat, an HDAC inhibitor, in combination with chemotherapy for patients with advanced stage non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). He also serves as Principal Investigator of the National Cancer Institute Cancer Therapy Evaluation Program-sponsored phase I study of ABT-888 in combination with carboplatin and paclitaxel for advanced solid tumors and has played a key role in clinical trials with RAD001, an mTOR inhibitor.

Dr. Ramalingam is also interested in developing new treatment options in elderly patients with lung cancer. His publication of ECOG data in elderly patients with NSCLC documented the higher toxicity and lack of efficacy of bevacizumab in this patient population and led to a major change in treatment practice patterns in the United States. He has played an active role in the Radiation Therapy Oncology Group.

Dr. Ramalingam has authored more than 100 papers in major oncology journals.

In his nomination of Dr. Ramalingam for the Young Investigator Award, Fadlo R. Khuri, MD, Professor and Chair, Department of Hematology and Medical Oncology, Emory University School of Medicine and Deputy Director, Winship Cancer Institute, wrote, “I am honored and delighted to nominate, with the greatest
enthusiasm, Dr. Suresh S. Ramalingam, a once-in-a-lifetime leader and clinical investigator who, at the precocious age of 43, has already left a lasting mark on the field of thoracic oncology as a whole.”

**A Practitioner of “The Art of Clinical Trial Design”**

Since assuming the role of Therapeutic Chair of the Thoracic Committee, Dr. Ramalingam has reorganized the clinical and translational efforts of the committee, which has led to the opening of six clinical trials.

“He has taken this arduous task with extreme seriousness and has successfully grown the committee’s clinical and translational efforts with wide scientific participation, regaining ECOG’s leadership in this area,” said Chandra P. Belani, MD, Miriam Beckner Distinguished Professor of Medicine, Penn State College of Medicine and Deputy Director, Penn State Hershey Cancer Institute. Dr. Belani, a member of ECOG-ACRIN, mentored Dr. Ramalingam when he joined the fellowship program at the University of Pittsburgh in 2000 and has worked closely with him on the Thoracic Committee.

“He learned the art of clinical trial design in the early part of his training and developed a keen interest in antineoplastic clinical pharmacology and the correlation of pharmacokinetics of chemotherapeutic agents with pharmacodynamics effects,” said Dr. Belani. “It has been a great satisfaction and personal delight to see him grow and prosper through the last decade. I will continue to support his endeavors, and the Young Investigator Award will allow him to stand tall and achieve the next level in his career.”

**An Excellent Clinician, Teacher, and Mentor**

Dr. Ramalingam has received numerous teaching and leadership awards and nurtured the careers of young investigators at both ECOG and his home institution.

“In addition to research, Dr. Ramalingam excels in teaching and patient care,” said Dr. Khuri. “Within his first year of joining Emory, he was chosen as the recipient of the James Eckman Teacher of the Year Award and has been included in the list of Best Doctors in America. He has also taken a very active role in educating the fellowship trainees on clinical research methods, and his leadership activities support the service, research, and teaching missions of Emory University School of Medicine and its Department of Hematology and Medical Oncology.”

Remarkably, no previous recipient of a Young Investigator Award was a full professor at the time the award was presented.

**Reflections**

“I wish to express my sincere thanks to the ECOG-ACRIN leadership and the ECOG Foundation selection committee for this award. I consider it a profound honor to work with the outstanding researchers and staff members at ECOG-ACRIN, who are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of patients with cancer,” said Dr. Ramalingam.