

FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE UPDATE

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Functional Oncology: Incorporating Genomics into Integrative Cancer Care

Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) has gained national attention over the past decade for its innovative approaches to cancer treatment involving integrative therapies and a collaborative team approach that places the individual patient—and his or her personalized needs—at the center of the care model. Dr. Bland began a discussion of this treatment model in the May issue when he interviewed Drs. Pankaj and Glynis Vashi, both of whom are practicing physicians at CTCA in Zion, Illinois.

Genomics is revolutionizing the practice of medicine in the 21st century, and this has been most evident in the field of oncology. In this issue, Dr. Bland interviews Dr. Edgar Staren, who joined Cancer Treatment Centers of America in 2005. In 2013, Dr. Staren was named President and CEO of CTCA Medicine and Science, a new creation of the CTCA organization which was formed solely for furthering personalized medicine treatments and therapies. Today, Dr. Staren is President of Ashion Advanced Individual Medicine, LLC (AIM), an organization created to provide state-of-the-art genomic testing and diagnostics to hospitals and medical facilities around the globe. AIM's mission is to provide premier personalized medicine solutions for healthcare providers by continuously advancing the knowledge and services to the patients they serve with the vision to be recognized as the global leader in the delivery of personalized medicine solutions.

Clinician/Researcher of the Month

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Dr. Edgar Staren has a renowned career in the field of oncology as a practicing surgeon, an academic leader, and as a medical executive. Although his professional background is both impeccable and impressive, Dr. Staren chooses to begin the interview with a personal narrative. Approximately 10 years ago, Dr. Staren was diagnosed with cancer—an aggressive sarcoma in his leg—and found himself in the role of patient (and healthcare consumer) rather than physician. This unexpected shift in perspective was a transformative experience for Dr. Staren that he now looks back on as a turning point in his career. He eventually took a position with Cancer Treatment Centers of America, an organization known for approaching medicine in an integrative manner, and is now fully focused on personalized medicine approaches to cancer treatment.

Dr. Bland and Dr. Staren discuss the evolution of cancer treatment over the past two decades. Dr. Staren also provides insights as to what he has learned about developing a model of patient-centric care both

as a clinician and from a business management perspective. As a result of his experiences and his research, Dr. Staren and his colleagues have published a number of studies in the medical literature about quality-of-life issues in cancer patients.

The interview moves to the topic of genomics and how developments in this field are influencing cancer treatment. Much of Dr. Staren's work has focused on breast cancer, which he uses as an example to describe how treatment has evolved and continues to evolve as new discoveries are made. He also discusses examples of how genomic therapy and personalized medicine can be found in other types of cancers, such as chronic myelogenous leukemia, gastrointestinal stromal tumors, and metastatic melanoma.

The field of genomics continues to advance rapidly. Dr. Staren feels that two areas are of critical importance: clinicians must educate themselves in an ongoing manner about changes to meet the needs of their patients and healthcare organizations (as an industry) must engage cooperative to share information that might lead to life-saving opportunities. With approximately 200 drugs for targeted therapy in the FDA pipeline, he also suggests that a facile mechanism for approval must be developed to ensure delivery of these important therapies.

The interview comes to a close with a discussion of early assessment and personalized prevention. Dr. Staren addresses the role of epigenetics in disease development and how genomic analysis can be used as a framework for determining possibilities for any given individual. He also feels that large-scale studies and the information they will yield—the 100K Wellness Project that has been undertaken by the Institute for Systems Biology is a specific example mentioned—will be crucial to the further development of personalized wellness approaches. REF #1-5

References

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