

# LEADER



Dr. Karen Ballen offers advanced care for leukemia patients through bone marrow transplant.

## INVESTING IN

Philanthropy in Action at UVA Cancer Center

### Creating a Destination of Hope

#### New Faculty Expand Care

**Patients coming to UVA Cancer Center** today find a growing number of options for care. Thanks to a surge of new hires, UVA Cancer Center is quickly becoming a destination of hope for all patients, no matter the type or stage of cancer they have.

One recent recruit, Karen Ballen, MD, oversees UVA's adult bone marrow transplant program, offering advanced care for patients with leukemia or other blood cancers.

"We are one of two programs in Virginia that offers the full complement of transplants—autologous, when cells are donated from the patient, as well as allogeneic, using cells from a matched or partially matched related donor, a volunteer unrelated donor, or an umbilical cord blood unit," says Ballen. "In addition, UVA

Cancer Center has received the highest level of accreditation for cell transplant, reflecting our excellent quality of care and patient outcomes."

Under Ballen's guidance, UVA Cancer Center has also structured its program to better meet the needs of its patients, many of whom travel great distances for treatment. UVA offers overnight facilities for certain procedures, and is moving as much care as possible into local communities through population health and telehealth initiatives. As a research priority, Ballen focuses on expanding transplant options for minorities, for whom matches may be harder to find.

While Ballen focuses on the adult bone marrow transplant program, Daniel "Trey" Lee, MD, heads up UVA's transplant program for pediatric patients, which he hopes to launch this fall.

*continued on back cover*



## Paying Forward

### Med School Alumnus Supports the Future of Gynecologic Oncology

**Medical school can be** incredibly intense, but for Jimmy Orr (A&S '71, Med '76) the calming force of a special mentor—Dr. Peyton Taylor—not only helped him succeed but inspired his life's work.

“Peyton laid the foundation for me to pursue a career in gynecologic oncology,” says Jimmy, medical director of the Lee Health's Regional Cancer Center and Florida Gynecologic Oncology. “When you are devoted to an important cause, it's important to promote it, support it, and create future opportunities for others to drive it forward.”

In 2013, Jimmy and his wife Vicki honored Taylor through a \$2 million bequest, establishing the James and Vicki Orr Clinical Professorship in Women's Oncology. They also wanted to make an impact on new generations of caregivers right now.

The Orrs began funding their bequest during their lifetime, staging the gift to have the most impact. Now each year, interest from the fund provides support for an Orr Scholar, helping first-year gynecologic oncology fellows pursue



Jimmy and Vicki Orr (far right) are opening up new opportunities for first-year fellows to conduct clinical research. The Orrs are pictured here with UVA Gynecologic Oncology Division Director Susan Modesitt (far left) and 2017 Orr Scholar Lisa Rauh.

a clinical research project. Regardless of whether the forward steps are small or big, medical progress does not occur without financial investment or support. The Orrs believe that “giving works best when driven by your values and connected to what you care about most.”

“Private philanthropy is going to take on a much larger role for medical education and research in the coming years as we face deep funding cuts,” explains Susan Modesitt, MD, director of UVA's Gynecologic Oncology Division and co-director of UVA's High Risk Breast and Ovarian Cancer Clinic. “The Orrs' generosity provides flexibility and support that helps our fellows conduct important research early in their careers.”

This year's Orr Scholar Lisa Rauh, MD (Med '19) has several projects she is considering pursuing, including

studying the cost effectiveness in treating cervical cancer patients who live at a distance using telehealth. The Orr fellowship will help her focus on her studies and research.

“I couldn't do this type of project on my own,” she explains. “The award can help purchase software or allow me to work with a statistician. Fellows don't have a lot of money, but we have good ideas. This award helps ensure our research is done right and will help the most people.”

This is the power of private support, explains Modesitt.

“We have to get these young doctors interested in research early,” Modesitt concludes. “If we can't conduct meaningful research, we won't enjoy future breakthroughs in cancer treatments that will save lives.”

Center opened five years ago, we felt we had a facility to meet the needs of our patients well into the future. Today, that path has changed dramatically. The number of patients receiving infusions, for example, has quadrupled, driven by new therapies. We will soon begin the expansion of the Couric Center to accommodate further growth.

Other adjustments will come in this time of great advances in cancer care. UVA Cancer Center will continue to grow to meet the needs of all of our patients—those of today and those of tomorrow.

— Robert Dreicer, MD  
Deputy Director, UVA Cancer Center

## Twenty Years of Dining for a Cause

### Benefit Dinner Established by a Grateful Patient Becomes Community Tradition

**Since 1997, Hamiltons' at First & Main** on the Downtown Mall in Charlottesville, Virginia, has reserved one very meaningful dinner each year to help raise support and awareness for UVA Cancer Center.

Following her breast cancer diagnosis, successful treatments and then recovery at UVA, Hamiltons' co-owner and Cancer Center Advisory Board Member Kate Hamilton and her husband Bill were looking for a way to give back, and realized that their new restaurant would be the perfect vehicle.



(From left to right) Bill Hamilton, Curtis Shaver, and Kate Hamilton at the 20th anniversary fundraising dinner at Hamiltons' at First & Main.

“We held a benefit day the first October after our restaurant opened and gave all of our proceeds to breast care research at UVA,” Kate says. “We happened to seat two members of the Cancer Center Board that day, who subsequently invited me to join the board. The following year, we changed the benefit day to a dinner event.”

Two decades later, the dinner has raised more than \$250,000 and become a community tradition. Each year has featured a different beneficiary within UVA Cancer Center. Past causes include Patient Support Services, the Infusion Center, the Emily Couric Clinical Cancer

Center building, as well as research efforts in pancreatic, brain, breast, lung, and skin cancers.

“Some years it's collaborative with UVA, a need will be identified and if it resonates that'll be our cause,” Bill notes. “One of the things we've always really loved doing is supporting seed research. It feels like a great way to leverage that night and the funds raised.”

The dinner celebrated its 20-year anniversary in March with a multiple-course menu and wine pairings prepared by Hamiltons' Chef de Cuisine Curtis Shaver.

“We're fortunate to have a great staff who want to share their time for this cause,” Kate says. “For the first several years, Bill was actually in the kitchen cooking, having planned the entire menu. There came a point when I really wanted him to come sit with me and be my date instead, and he has ever since.”

This year, the event raised almost \$9,000 to benefit survivorship programs at UVA, which are managed by Christi Sheffield, supportive cares services manager, and Tracey Gosse, breast care program manager. Both gave brief remarks at the event, and UVA Cancer Center Director Tom Loughran, MD, also spoke about the state of the cancer center.

Both Kate and Bill agree that, for them, the most poignant and memorable moments are when friends, family, and community members share the personal experiences they've had at UVA, and why a cause is particularly meaningful and impactful for them.

“This dinner is a real highlight for us,” Bill says. “It's really become part of our DNA at the restaurant. We look forward to what the future holds.”



(From left to right) In their red volunteer aprons, UVA Cancer Center Advisory Board Members Ginny Semmes, Wendy Seay, and Martha Weiss.

## Volunteer Spotlight

*Cancer Center Advisory Board Members Explain What Volunteering Means to Them*

“When I joined the advisory board, I became aware that several other board members were long-time volunteers in the Infusion Center. I thought it would be a good way to better appreciate the experience of the people we ultimately serve. Being a retired nurse, I also missed being in a medical setting and interacting with patients and families. As a volunteer, I circulate through three floors of waiting rooms with a beverage cart. What has been particularly striking to me is the sincere gratitude expressed by patients and their families for both the simple comfort measures I provide and for the care they receive from the physicians and nurses. I realized as people ‘stack appointments,’ they often spend many hours in the center and it is an opportunity for them to receive other support services to ease the stress of a cancer diagnosis.”

— Wendy Seay

“Volunteering at the Infusion Center has been an extremely meaningful experience. Having the ability to offer sustenance, comfort, and sometimes, solace, is a way of giving back to patients who are so grateful for all of the many small services that the volunteers provide.”

— Ginny Semmes

### THE LEADERSHIP CORNER

**Growing.** That's how I would describe UVA Cancer Center today. We are growing our faculty and have seen a significant increase in the number of patients that we care for. We are expanding clinical services and creating clinical and research partnerships across the state.

Nowhere is this growth more evident than in our clinical research programs. This year, we will undertake our first CAR T cell clinical trial in pancreatic cancer, with others planned.

Some growth is planned and predictable. At other times, it takes us in unexpected directions. When the Emily Couric Clinical Cancer

Center opened five years ago, we felt we had a facility to meet the needs of our patients well into the future. Today, that path has changed dramatically. The number of patients receiving infusions, for example, has quadrupled, driven by new therapies. We will soon begin the expansion of the Couric Center to accommodate further growth.

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UVA Cancer Center  
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# INVESTING IN HOPE

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“We believe that Virginians of any age who need a bone marrow transplant should not have to leave the state,” says Lee.

Lee’s arrival at UVA also means that pediatric patients will have access to a promising form of immunotherapy that has shown to be particularly effective for childhood cancers. Immunotherapy uses a patient’s own immune cells, called T cells, to fight cancer. Lee genetically engineers T cells to make a new protein called CAR (chimeric antigen receptor). Immediately after a patient is infused, the CAR T cells begin to kill cancer cells. Lee was among the second group of researchers worldwide to infuse children with relapsed leukemia with CAR T cells, and the results are encouraging.

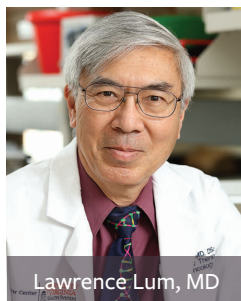


Daniel “Trey” Lee, MD

“Almost five years after starting the trial, our leukemia-free survival rate is 60 percent, which is significantly higher than the 10 to 20 percent seen in similar patients given conventional therapies,” he says.

UVA is the only place in the Commonwealth where this therapy is offered. Lee is also developing new CAR T cell therapies

for deadly forms of brain cancer that affect children.



Lawrence Lum, MD

A fellow recruit, Lawrence Lum, MD, pioneered immunotherapy that uses two antibodies that bind to both T cells and tumor cells to form a killing bridge between the two. This method shows special promise in treating solid tumors, and it can be done simply in an outpatient setting. In one of Lum’s trials, patients with incurable metastatic breast cancer who received infusions of activated T cells had an overall survival rate nearly twice as long as patients who received conventional treatment. In a second trial, patients with incurable pancreatic cancer had an overall survival rate three times as long as patients who received conventional therapy.

“The best cancer institutions in the country combine excellent clinical care, clinical research, and basic science research, and invest in all the support infrastructure needed to run these programs well and treat very complicated patients,” concludes Lee. “In my view, UVA is part of that group.”

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