



Joseph E. Kerschner, MD

## MCW's New Cancer Research Building Will Stimulate Collaborations in Science Aimed at Decreasing the Region's Cancer Burden

Joseph E. Kerschner, MD

The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2022, approximately 37,300 Wisconsin residents will be diagnosed with cancer and nearly 11,600 will die from the disease.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, our state is above the national average for rates of cancer incidence and mortality, with persisting disparities in geographic areas, as well as among racial and ethnic minority populations.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, a 2015 study by researchers at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) on breast and colorectal cancer survival disparities in the 8-county region in southeastern Wisconsin – including the city of Milwaukee – revealed significant cancer survival disparities by race, ethnicity, sex, and geography in southeastern Wisconsin. Such disparities are a top public health priority.<sup>3</sup>

Accelerating discoveries that will eradicate the cancer burden in Wisconsin is a priority for MCW. In particular, focusing on eliminating disparities in cancer care and survival is a primary emphasis of this priority. To that end, the overarching mission of the MCW Cancer Center is to work through an equity lens to reduce the cancer burden in Wisconsin through transformational cancer research, exceptional education

• • •

**Author Affiliations:** Joseph E. Kerschner, MD, is Provost and Executive Vice President and The Julia A. Uihlein, MA, Dean of the School of Medicine, Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

and training, multidisciplinary quality patient care, statewide cancer prevention programs, and progressive public policy implementation.

We have been moving quickly to execute effectively on this mission. In 2019, Governor Tony Evers and the Wisconsin State Legislature

the MCW Cancer Center and the Ann E. Heil Professor in the MCW Department of Medicine is engaging members of the community in the building's design, as well as formally launching an investigative research project on the impact of the Cancer Research Building for the com-

*Accelerating discoveries that will eradicate the cancer burden in Wisconsin is a priority for MCW. In particular, focusing on eliminating disparities in cancer care and survival is a primary emphasis of this priority.*

committed a \$10 million Wisconsin State Building Commission grant within the 2019-2021 biennial state budget toward a cancer research building for MCW. When complete, the building will be Milwaukee's only cancer-dedicated research facility and will support our scientists and physicians to advance research that addresses the unique cancer burden of southeastern Wisconsin and beyond – ultimately improving clinical outcomes for all patients.

Currently in its design phase, this state-of-the-art facility features a building design with tremendous promise for accelerating research and community impact. Community impact continues to be at the forefront of the planning process, not only within this new research building but the entire MCW Cancer Center program. In particular, Melinda Stolley, PhD, Associate Director of Population Science Research at

communities we serve and its role in advancing health equity.

On the research front, the new Cancer Research Building will serve many important purposes. It will increase capacity for wet and dry lab space, enabling our researchers – and those we collaborate with across the state – to accelerate their work toward discoveries that will lead to life-saving new treatments. The space will be used to stimulate new partnerships in science aimed at decreasing the region's cancer burden through research, education, and outreach in the causes, prevention, early detection, and development of cancer treatments. Among the cutting-edge enhancements expected to be included in the new building are CryoEM (a version of electron microscopy that enables high-resolution, 3-dimensional data collection on samples that

could not be used with other techniques in the past) and cellular therapy labs for chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy, which has been the subject of numerous MCW clinical trials in the past several years.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the 130,000 to 150,000 square-foot Cancer Research Building will maximize state-of-the-art and progressive research practices across the entire spectrum of disciplines including basic, translational, clinical, population science, and policy. Further, by leveraging the Cancer Center's team science approach, the new building will provide tremendous opportunities to enhance efficiencies and collaboration within scientific neighborhoods that address the MCW Cancer Center's strategic priorities. The Cancer Center's "Integrated Disease-Oriented Teams" (iDOT) – comprising basic, translational, and clinical cancer researchers/physicians who are involved in improving care delivery – will

benefit from expanded collaborative space to develop research from the bench to the bedside to the community – and back.

The development of the Cancer Research Building underscores MCW's commitment to diagnosing and treating rare cancers, which affect fewer than 40,000 individuals annually in the US – although as a group, they comprise slightly more than 25% of all cancers. And because rates in children are very low, all children's cancers as considered "rare." Rare cancers cause about a quarter of all cancer deaths each year.<sup>5</sup> The new building will leverage key scientific investments to accelerate discoveries in metabolomics, structural biology, immuno-oncology, precision oncology, and rare cancers, and cancer disparities – for the eradication of cancer for all.

Groundbreaking for MCW's new Cancer Research Building is expected in summer 2022.

I anticipate sharing progress on the new Cancer Research Building in future Dean's columns.

## REFERENCES

1. Cancer Statistics Center. Wisconsin at-a-glance. American Cancer Society. Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/#/state/Wisconsin>
2. United States Cancer Statistics: Data Visualizations. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://gis.cdc.gov/Cancer/USCS/#/AtAGlance/>
3. Beyer KMM, Zhou Y, Matthews K, Hoormann K, et al. Breast and Colorectal Cancer Survival Disparities in Southeastern Wisconsin. *WMJ*. 2016;115(1):17-21. <https://wmjonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/115/1/17.pdf>
4. J. Kerschner, CAR T-cell Immunotherapy Bringing Hope Where None Existed. *WMJ*. 2018;117(1):45-46.
5. MyPART - My Pediatric and Adult Rare Tumor Network. National Cancer Institute Center for Cancer Research. Posted February 27, 2019. Accessed March 28, 2022. <https://www.cancer.gov/pediatric-adult-rare-tumor/rare-tumors/about-rare-cancers>

## Systems Thinking Is Vital to Long-Term Equitable COVID-19 Response and Recovery in Wisconsin

### REFERENCES continued from page 11

30. In communities deserted by pharmacies, advocates fear inequitable COVID-19 vaccine access. *CBS Chicago*. December 24, 2020. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2020/12/24/in-communities-deserted-by-pharmacies-advocates-fear-inequitable-covid-19-vaccine-access/>
31. Chen D, Johnson M, Heim M. 'Every man for himself': Wisconsin's vaccine rollout has been confusing and frustrating. Health officials promise it will get better. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Updated January 25, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2021/01/23/wisconsins-vaccine-distribution-plan-confusing-but-speeding-up/4232367001/>
32. Mills S. Time, extra effort and trust: local organizations increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake in hard-to-reach communities. *Wisconsin Public Radio*. August 25, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.wpr.org/time-extra-effort-and-trust-local-organizations-increase-covid-19-vaccine-uptake-hard-reach>
33. Eisenstein C. *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. North Atlantic Books; 2013.
34. Carper introduces legislation to reconnect and revitalize communities divided by highways. News release. US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. April 19, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2021/4/carper-leads-senate-democrats-in-introducing-legislation-to-reconnect-and-revitalize-communities-divided-by-highways>
35. 2021-23 Wisconsin State Budget: Summary of Governor's Budget Recommendations. Legislative Fiscal Bureau of Wisconsin; March 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/>

[budget/2021\\_23\\_biennial\\_budget/502\\_summary\\_of\\_governor\\_s\\_budget\\_recommendations\\_march\\_2021\\_entire\\_document.pdf](https://www.wisconsin.gov/budget/2021_23_biennial_budget/502_summary_of_governor_s_budget_recommendations_march_2021_entire_document.pdf)

36. Fact sheet: historic bipartisan infrastructure deal. News release. The White House. July 28, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/07/28/fact-sheet-historic-bipartisan-infrastructure-deal/>
37. O'Neil M. Moving Mindsets - Building Momentum Over Time. Wisconsin Partnership Program webinar. March 26, 2021. Accessed July 20, 2021. <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/presentation/moving-mindsets-building-momentum/>
38. Warren May L, Beery J, Gary-Webb TL, Peet ED, Kohler J. Equitable data analysis: lessons from a COVID-19 research collaborative. *The RAND Blog*. July 27, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/07/equitable-data-analysis-lessons-from-a-covid-19-research.html>
39. Harrington B. The anti-vaccine con job is becoming untenable: why targets of deliberate deception often hesitate to admit they've been deceived. *The Atlantic*. August 1, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/08/vaccine-refusers-dont-want-blue-americas-respect/619627/>
40. Pappas S. Social science and the COVID-19 vaccines. American Psychological Association. March 31, 2021. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/03/covid-19-vaccines>
41. Sellers FS, Berkowitz B. These are the pro-vaccine messages people want to hear. *The Washington Post*. April 21, 2021. Accessed July 24, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/interactive/2021/covid-vaccine-messages/>

*Let us hear  
from you!*

If an article strikes  
a chord or you have  
something on your  
mind related to medi-  
cine, share it with your  
colleagues. Email your  
letter to the editor to  
[wmj@med.wisc.edu](mailto:wmj@med.wisc.edu).

**WMJ**

advancing the art & science of medicine in the midwest

**WMJ**

*WMJ* (ISSN 1098-1861) is published through a collaboration between The Medical College of Wisconsin and The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. The mission of *WMJ* is to provide an opportunity to publish original research, case reports, review articles, and essays about current medical and public health issues.

© 2022 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and The Medical College of Wisconsin, Inc.

**Visit [www.wmjonline.org](http://www.wmjonline.org) to learn more.**