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American Cancer Society

New grant fulfills wish of late Baltimore Orioles team photographer

Grant will help highlight rare but deadly form of skin cancer

ATLANTA—July 27, 2007 – A new American Cancer Society research grant honors the wishes of long-time Baltimore Orioles team photographer Jerry Wachter, who recognized the need for increased attention to a rare but dangerous form of skin cancer that took his life in 2005. The \$30,000 two-year grant to University of Washington School of Medicine investigator Paul Nghiem, M.D., Ph.D., will enhance efforts to educate the public, patients, and physicians about Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC), which took Wachter's life in 2005.

"Because of a lack of awareness of this disease, MCC patients are often treated as though they have a different type of cancer and do not receive adequate or proper treatment," said Dr. Nghiem. "This grant will make it possible for us to help close a critical gap in understanding of this deadly disease, allowing us to educate physicians to help ensure that patients get the best treatment possible." The funds will be used to enhance an existing educational website (www.merkelcell.org) created by Dr. Nghiem's group as well as to pursue journal publications that will educate clinicians about the disease.

Funding for the grant comes through the JW Fund, established by the Wachter family to support the American Cancer Society in its efforts to battle Merkel cell carcinoma, a rare but deadly cancer. After serving as the Orioles' team photographer for 36 years, Jerry Wachter died of MCC in 2005. MCC is linked to sun exposure and age. While other types of skin cancer such as melanoma are far more well-known, MCC is very deadly. Its 5-year relative survival rate is just 60 percent, compared to 91 percent for melanoma. The number of Americans diagnosed with MCC has grown rapidly in the past 15 years to about 1,400 cases per year, a number that is expected to grow in the future.

MCC usually appears as a firm, painless lump on sun-exposed areas of the body. The lump is usually less than 2 cm (about ¾ inch) in size and can be red, pink, or blue-violet. MCC is different from other skin cancers in that it grows rapidly over a few weeks or months.

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The American Cancer Society is the largest non-government, not-for-profit funding source of cancer research in the United States, focusing on beginning researchers and novel research opportunities. Since 1946, the Society has invested approximately \$3.1 billion in research, targeting areas of special need, such as cancer in the poor and underserved. Grantees are selected by stringent peer review. Forty Society-funded researchers have gone on to win the Nobel Prize, the highest accolade of scientific achievement. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

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