

Massey is unwavering

in its effort to deliver the best possible cancer care through cutting-edge research, patient care, education and community engagement.

The generosity of Massey Club donors plays a crucial role in helping us achieve our vision of being a premier community-focused cancer center leading the nation in cancer research and ensuring optimal health outcomes for all.



Massey's first-ever P01 grant could change the way liver cancer is treated

Liver cancer – the third-leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide – is often diagnosed at an advanced stage when there are significantly limited treatment options. A group of renowned researchers at VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center was awarded more than \$13 million through a team science grant from the National Cancer Institute to collectively explore new, effective drug combinations.

The five-year grant – the first P01 grant ever awarded to Massey – will initiate a four-pronged approach to better understand the biology of liver tumors and advanced treatment options for hepatocellular carcinoma, the most common form of liver cancer.

“Our collective energy is a lot more synergistic than what we have all been doing individually in our own laboratories,” said **Devanand Sarkar, Ph.D.**, who holds the Harrison Foundation Distinguished Professorship in Cancer Research. “Within the umbrella of this grant, we have four separate research projects asking different molecular questions, but with the same ultimate goal of identifying how we can exploit our findings to improve the efficacy of immunotherapy in liver cancer.”

With the goal of moving project findings forward into a clinical trial, this group of scientists is credited with more than 300 published research papers combined.

“There are no other large, grant-funded projects like this in the country for obesity-associated liver cancer,” said Sarkar, the principal investigator on the grant as well as associate director of cancer research training and education and a member of Massey’s Cancer Biology research program. “It has the potential to change the way the disease is treated.” **M**



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— **Devanand Sarkar, Ph.D.**



Read more by scanning the QR code.

MASSEY CLUB

IMPACT REPORT

Team science gives patients a fighting chance against drug resistance

Just as building a house requires diverse skills, creating effective cancer drugs demands collaboration across various specialties.

Saïd Sebti, Ph.D., used the analogy to highlight the importance of team science in developing cancer treatments at a recent Innovators Forum hosted for Massey supporters. He described how a team of Massey scientists have combined their expertise to discover a new combination therapy that overcomes drug resistance in lung tumors with a specific mutation.

By combining the drugs FGTI-2734 and sotorasib, the collaborators completely shut down the means by which these tumors were able to build up a resistance to the treatment. Offering a novel approach to treating resistant lung cancer, the breakthrough could significantly improve patient outcomes.

Sebti, Massey's associate director for basic research and the Lacy Family Chair in Cancer Research, said, "We're hoping to give patients a fighting chance against resistance." **M**

Massey Club donor finds multiple ways to support center's mission

Inspired by her experiences as a Massey patient, **Audrey D. Landers, Ph.D.**, has been a dedicated annual donor for years. In 2021, she elevated her commitment with a Massey Club-level gift to support the center's most promising opportunities and push the boundaries of innovative cancer research and care.

This year, she took that support a step further by endowing a professorship to honor her oncologist, **Mary Helen Hackney, M.D.** Landers wanted to create permanent support for Massey through the endowment, helping recruit and retain the best scientists while providing critical research funding in perpetuity.

"In the play 'Airline Highway' there is a living funeral for the main character, who's dying but wants to be present when her friends celebrate her life," explained Landers. "Similarly, while I'm alive, I want to know that Dr. Hackney, her name and her passion, will be remembered forever in this special way." **M**



Audrey D. Landers, Ph.D. (left), with her oncologist, Mary Helen Hackney, M.D.



MASSEY *by the* NUMBERS

765

Massey Club households supported the cancer center in FY25.

\$5,016,638

was raised in unrestricted gifts of \$1,000 or more through Massey Club



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To learn more about research at Massey or to renew your gift to Massey Club, please contact Riley Cain at masseyclub@vcu.edu.

To opt out of receiving fundraising communications from VCU Health, contact 1-844-445-9126 or FundraisingOptOut@vcuhealth.org