Leaders' update
A message from Dr. Charles Geyer, associate director for clinical research

VCU Massey Cancer Center has a rich history of innovative and vibrant clinical research, developed and conducted by superb basic and clinical scientists supported by an outstanding clinical research staff and the remarkable philanthropic generosity of Massey supporters. I continue to feel a strong sense of privilege and excitement about the opportunity to become a part of this growing program. The shared vision of achieving NCI Comprehensive Cancer Center status in 2016, coupled with the willingness of the leadership of VCU, VCU Health System and Massey to commit resources and support the changes necessary to achieve that vision was quite compelling during my interview process last year. Achieving Comprehensive status will require contributions from everyone at Massey, but it is evident that one essential requirement for success will be rapid expansion in the quantity, quality and efficiency of our clinical trial program needed to bring the exciting discoveries occurring in the labs of our basic and translational researchers into the clinics of Massey and our research affiliates.

One of our first initiatives has been the restructuring of our Clinical Trials Office to move away from a model in which disease-and modality-specific research teams functioned somewhat independently. We have created six director-level positions, each of which has oversight responsibility for the major domains of the clinical trial process. This was a critical first step in developing uniform processes for staff training, protocol development, protocol management, regulatory compliance, data quality, affiliate site collaborations and publication of study results. Martha Wellons, director of clinical research development, manages the protocol and project development teams including the OnCore clinical trials data management system. Director of Research Nursing and Data Management Cindy McKeown has two associate directors: Mary Beth Tombes, who oversees Massey, sponsored investigator initiated trials (IITs), and Jane Baggett, who is responsible for trials sponsored by the NCI or pharmaceutical partners. Regulatory, compliance and auditing are now under the direction of Catherine Brown, regulatory affairs and administrative manager. Juellisa Gadd, senior clinical research administrator, oversees financial administration including billing compliance, affiliate payments and budgeting and contracting. The medical writing team, led by Senior Science Writer Kevin Hogan, provides support for clinical investigators in the development of grant applications, concepts, protocols and manuscripts. This team meets on a regular basis to develop and maintain an efficient and integrated program for clinical research.

In the previous month's leaders' update, Dr. Ginder discussed the application we submitted in collaboration with nine research affiliate institutions to become a Minority-Based NCI Community Oncology Research Program (MB-NCORP). The application included our newest affiliate, Virginia Cancer Institute, the major hematology/medical oncology community practice located in the Richmond metropolitan area. The NCI has made extensive changes to the national clinical trials program over the past few years, including consolidation of the cooperative groups and restructuring of the Community Clinical Oncology Program (CCOP) system to the new NCORP mechanism. In addition to conducting traditional clinical trials, the NCORP will also conduct Cancer Care Delivery Research (CCDR). Massey has actively participated in the national clinical trials program both as a Minority-Based CCOP and as members of groups such as the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP), Radiation Therapy Oncology Group (RTOG) and Cancer and Leukemia Group B (CALGB). Moving forward, this participation will occur in collaboration with our affiliates across the state as a MB-NCORP if our application is approved. Based on our strong history in clinical trials as a Minority Based-CCOP and the national leadership in CCDR of the Massey Cancer Prevention and Control program, we are optimistic our application will be successful.

Establishing and growing a healthy referral network will be an important part of expanding our IIT program. We hope to implement a “concierge service” to screen patients for eligibility in our phase 1 and Phase 2 IITs to both improve accrual and improve the service we provide to patients and physicians across the state.

I would encourage anyone who is interested in learning more about our Clinical Research Affiliation Network to consider attending our annual retreat being held Saturday, April 12 from 8 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Wyndham Virginia Crossings Hotel and Conference Center located at 1000 Virginia Center Parkway in Glen Allen, VA. Participants will hear from a variety of Massey’s clinical researchers, who will discuss a number of exciting initiatives, and have the opportunity to meet physicians from affiliate sites across the state. To RSVP, please contact Wanda Hunt by March 1 at wshunt@vcu.edu or (804) 628-2086.

Sincerely,

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