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Cancer Stem Cell Biology and Therapy Center of Economic Excellence Names International Expert as First Endowed Chair

Dr. Li's research suggests potential vaccine against colon cancer.

COLUMBIA, S.C., April 29, 2010 - - Colon cancer is the third most common cancer in the United States and the third leading cause of cancer deaths, with 49,920 deaths in 2009. While morbidity rates have declined due to early detection, colon cancer remains a deadline threat to men and women. The recruitment of Zihai Li, MD, PhD, as the first endowed chair in the Health Sciences South Carolina-supported Cancer Stem Cell Biology and Therapy Center of Economic Excellence (CoEE), is good news for South Carolina. An international expert in tumor immunology and oncology, Dr. Li's research suggests there is potential to develop a vaccine against colon cancer.

Dr. Li made international headlines in October 2009 when a report of his studies was published in *Stem Cells*. The study revealed the potential for human stem cells to provide a vaccination against colon cancer. Speaking about his discovery, Dr. Li said, "This finding potentially opens up a new paradigm for cancer vaccine research. Cancer and stem cells share many molecular and biological features. By immunizing the host with stem cells, we are able to 'fool' the immune system to believe that cancer cells are present and thus to initiate a tumor-combating immune program. Although we have only tested the protection against colon cancer, we believe that stem cells might be useful for generating an immune response against a broad spectrum of cancers, thus serving as a universal cancer vaccine."

The Cancer Stem Cell Biology and Therapy CoEE is based at the MUSC Hollings Cancer Center, the only National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center in South Carolina. Research conducted at the Center seeks to improve cancer outcomes by developing new therapeutic options for killing cancer stem cells, including stem cell replacement. The research focus of this Center is two-fold: first, identify ways to use stem cells found in bone marrow or adult organs as treatment targets for cancer therapy; second, develop and market the bioengineering aspects of stem cell collection and utilization for more functional, adaptable clinical applications. Dr. Li's endowed chair is at MUSC. A second endowed chair will be recruited to join him.

Dr. Li earned a medical degree in China, followed by a PhD in Immunology from Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. He completed his residency in Medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York and a fellowship in Hematology and Oncology at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, WA. He joins MUSC from the University of Connecticut Health Center.

Commenting on Dr. Li's appointment, HSSC President and CEO Jay Moskowitz said, "We are both fortunate and honored to have recruited a cancer researcher of Dr. Li's stature to South Carolina. He, like the other endowed chairs supported by Health Sciences South Carolina and part of the Centers of Economic Excellence Program, is a research 'superstar' capable to life-altering discoveries. Dr. Li's research and the results we hope he will achieve in terms of developing a vaccine against colon cancer is a positive step forward for South Carolina and the world at large."

About Health Sciences South Carolina

Established in April 2004, Health Sciences South Carolina (HSSC) is a statewide public-private collaborative of research-intensive universities and major health systems possessing the shared vision of using health sciences research to improve the health, health care and economic wellbeing of South Carolina. HSSC includes Clemson University, the Medical University of South Carolina, the University of South Carolina, Greenville Hospital System University Medical Center, Palmetto Health, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System, McLeod Health, Self Regional Healthcare and AnMed Health. For more information, visit www.healthsciencessc.org.