Faculty Spotlight:

Youn Kim, MD

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The Joanne and Peter Haas, Jr. Professor of Cutaneous Lymphoma Research Professor of Dermatology Professor (by courtesy) of Medicine (Oncology)

Summary of Research
Dr. Youn Kim directs Stanford’s Multidisciplinary Cutaneous Lymphoma Program (MCLP), which offers the most comprehensive and optimal care for patients with this rare disorder. Devoted to understanding and treating this rash-like cancer, the program is a national leader in clinical and translational research. In operation for more than three decades, MCLP is one of Stanford’s longest running interdisciplinary clinics and has set the standard for many others.

Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL) is a cancer of T lymphocytes, immune cells that normally circulate in the bloodstream to help the body fight invading pathogens. But when a person has cutaneous T-cell lymphoma, the lymphocytes grow uncontrollably in a place they are not supposed to: inside the skin. The result can be itchy red eruptions that can cover the whole body.

CTCL is rare—afflicting one in 100,000 people—but because it is highly visible and can cause uncontrolled itching, it can have an intense impact on patients’ quality of life. Few doctors have seen CTCL because it is so rare. And because it often looks like a rash, it’s easily misdiagnosed.

“The reason I went into cutaneous lymphoma with a dermatology background is that you see too many patients being misdiagnosed, and their care being mismanaged,” Dr. Kim said. “Patients are suffering. Obviously we need to do better.”

In 2012, Dr. Kim brought together an international team of experts to create the Cutaneous Lymphoma
International Consortium (CLIC), which seeks to advance the knowledge of this rare cancer and improve patient care through innovative and collaborative studies.

With Dr. Kim serving as the U.S. director of CLIC and Stanford’s MCLP leading the way, CLIC is building infrastructure for collaboration and establishing a virtual Biobank of tissue samples as well as a digital pathology databank to link participating centers. More than 60 research centers from around the world share key scientific discoveries and are able to validate findings to expedite the discoveries into translational research and ultimately into treatments that can help alleviate patient suffering.

One of the first projects that Dr. Kim led through the consortium was the search for biomarkers—tests that can clump patients into groups to predict who will respond best to which treatment. By combining all their data sets, members of the consortium hope they can find genes, blood tests, or immunological markers that can tell them whether, for instance, someone is likely to have a worse case of the disease and should be funneled toward a transplant earlier than other patients. At Stanford, collaborative work with Drs. Paul Khavari and Howard Chang—world leaders in cancer genomics and epigenomics—identified key genetic alterations that underlie and drive cutaneous lymphoma. The physician-scientists discovered a new role for a mutation in TNFR2, a protein that provides cancer cells a survival advantage and could lead to targeted therapies.

**Biography**

Dr. Kim earned her undergraduate degree in chemistry from Wellesley College and attended Stanford University School of Medicine. She went on to Kaiser – San Francisco for her internship and completed her residency at Stanford. The first Joanne and Peter Haas Jr. Professors of Cutaneous Lymphoma Research, Dr. Kim is a Professor of Dermatology and Medicine/Oncology (by Courtesy) and a member of the Stanford Cancer Institute.

A co-founder and co-leader of the Cutaneous Lymphoma International Consortium, Dr. Kim has also served on the Board of Directors of the US Cutaneous Lymphoma Consortium and as President of the International Society for Cutaneous Lymphomas. An elected member of the American Dermatologic Association, the American Society of Hematology, the American Academy of Dermatology, and the Society for Investigative Dermatology, Dr. Kim has published extensively on cutaneous lymphoma.

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