

## **U-M makes major pancreatic cancer find**

Researchers find virulent disease's stem cells, which could lead to more effective treatment.

### **Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News**

University of Michigan researchers have discovered the stem cells in pancreatic cancers, a breakthrough that could lead to better treatments of one of the deadliest cancers, according to research that will be published in today's journal of Cancer Research.

"It's the worst cancer you can get," said Diane Simeone, the study's lead author and surgical director of U-M's Multidisciplinary Pancreatic Tumor Clinic. "There hasn't been significant progress in effectively treating pancreatic cancer for a long time. I am optimistic this may be a real breakthrough in how we treat pancreatic cancer in the future."

Stem cells are the most basic cells, and researchers believe a small, but resistant, number of cancer stem cells fuel the growth of tumors.

Many people relapse or die because current treatments don't kill all the cancer stem cells in the tumor.

The discovery of the stem cells means researchers can now study how to destroy them, according to Simeone.

U-M researchers were the first to discover cancer stems cells in a solid tumor of the breast in 2003. Since then, researchers have also discovered the stem cells in brain, central nervous system, colon cancers and leukemia, which has led to continued research into more effective therapies.

The breakthrough in pancreatic cancer is especially important because almost everyone who is diagnosed with the disease dies from it because diagnosis often occurs after the disease has spread.

The only therapy for pancreatic cancer is surgery to remove the tumor, and only 15 percent of people can undergo the treatment.

"If this is heading in the direction to find a cure for this nasty disease, then huge kudos to the doctors that discovered this," said Brownstown Township resident Terry Fornwall, a former pancreatic cancer sufferer now in remission.

Clinical trials for new therapies could come within three to four years, which thrilled advocates.