

NOTABLE CANCER CENTER MEMBER

Timothy J. Kuzel, MD



Life before medical school is only a vague memory for Timothy Kuzel. Medicine wasn't necessarily part of his plan, but when he received the letter accepting him into the combined college / medical school program (Inteflex) that would allow him to graduate from the University of Michigan in 6 years, everything fell into place. "It was just one of those things," he recalls. "A door opens, a path unfolds and you say 'I'll go down that road for a while and see where it takes me.'"

Today, Timothy Kuzel, MD, is the Director of the Clinical Research Office for the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University and Professor of Medicine in the Division of Hematology/Oncology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. He joined the faculty in 1990, after completing medical school at the University of Michigan and his residency/fellowship at the McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University.

The decision to specialize in hematology / oncology was more deliberate. Dr. Merrill Keyes and Dr. Leo Gordon were among the faculty that impressed Dr. Kuzel with their bedside manner and their knowledge. The types of diseases, the science, and how much was yet to be learned all led him to believe that oncology was a "field that had real opportunities to evolve in the coming years," and he has not been disappointed. "What we've learned and the ability to apply it therapeutically has been staggering," he says, and believes the

ability to synthesize designer molecules to inhibit specific targets and cells may be the most promising concept of the past decade.

Dr. Kuzel singles out Gleevec, a therapy that affects the molecular cause of Chronic Myeloid Leukemia (CML), with pioneering the ability to target “so exquisitely a single protein that can perturb a cell so greatly.” He is gratified to see such effective drugs being introduced with increasing regularity and looks forward to seeing similar targeted strategies become available for a wider range of cancers. “It’s clearly the discovery process that excites me about oncology,” says Kuzel. “Taking basic science concepts and figuring out a way we can apply them at the bedside,” is the beginning, but it’s “learning from the results and then going back to the lab to try to improve upon them” that is the most stimulating.

An anomaly in the sense that he treats both liquid and solid tumors, Dr. Kuzel cannot be defined by any one label. In addition to his work with genitourinary (GU) malignancies, which encompass cancers of the prostate, bladder, kidney, and testis, he also works with melanomas, non-melanomatous skin cancers, and skin lymphomas. Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL) has been a major research focus for Dr. Kuzel. “The research principles that I utilize with that group of patients are really the same ones that I draw on for my GU and melanoma work,” he says. He tries to identify a basic question based on the biology of a disease, and then looks for a therapeutic modality that will act on a weakness in that disease. Dr. Kuzel has successfully been able to apply the knowledge he gained from his extensive CTCL research to the biologic therapies he is currently using for kidney cancer and melanoma. His wide range of interests effect Dr. Kuzel’s teaching style as well. “The fellows, residents, and medical students can come to a morning clinic with me and see six different diseases. It is never monotonous.”

Cancer Center Director, Steve Rosen, MD was the first to stimulate Dr. Kuzel’s lifelong interest in CTCL. “I started working with him when I was a second year fellow and it was a wonderful decision. Steve has been a tremendous inspiration to me and a mentor throughout,” he says.

Currently, Dr. Kuzel serves as the leader for the Clinical Research Core of the prostate cancer

SPORE. In collaboration with Dr. Chung Lee, he has co-authored papers on TGF-beta resistance based cellular therapy for prostate cancer patients. He is also a co-investigator with Dr. Lee on his SPORE pilot research project and will be responsible for treating all prostate cancer patients in the clinical protocol. He has previously been the principal investigator on NIH funded translational projects in the field of anti-angiogenesis. Dr. Kuzel is also an active member of the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group and has served on a number of peer review panels for NCI and NIH programs and grant applications.

Although Dr. Kuzel enjoys golf and tennis, he readily acknowledges, “Trying to keep my children happy is my biggest hobby.” He has coached soccer teams for both his children and helped out with basketball and softball, as well. Now that his daughter is focused on ballet, he admits to a few limitations. “I can applaud and videotape performances. That’s about all I can do for now.”