

ACADEMIC CONNECTIONS

THOUGHTS AND UPDATES FROM DR. W. P. ANDREW LEE

September 4, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Dr. Joan Conaway and I are delighted to announce the appointment of **Ralph DeBerardinis, M.D., Ph.D.**, as the new Director of the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development and the Center for Human Genetics, effective Sept. 1. He now holds the Eugene McDermott Distinguished Chair for the Study of Human Growth and Development and the Philip O'Bryan Montgomery, Jr., M.D. Distinguished Chair in Developmental Biology.

Dr. DeBerardinis has been a faculty member at UT Southwestern since 2008, when he was appointed Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and in the Eugene McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development. In the years since, he has established himself as a highly respected scientist, physician, and leader. In 2011, he joined Children's Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern (CRI), and he currently directs CRI's Genetic and Metabolic Disease Program, which he will continue to lead. Dr. DeBerardinis has also served as Division Chief of Genetics and Metabolism in the Department of Pediatrics since 2013, a role he relinquished upon assuming these new responsibilities.



A physician-scientist, Dr. DeBerardinis earned his medical degree and Ph.D. in cell and molecular biology from the University of Pennsylvania, where he pursued postdoctoral training in cancer biology. He completed residencies in pediatrics and medical genetics followed by a fellowship in clinical biochemical genetics at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

As a clinician, Dr. DeBerardinis focuses on pediatric genetics and newborn screening for metabolic disorders. With grant support from federal, state, and philanthropic organizations, his laboratory studies the role of altered metabolic states in human diseases, particularly pediatric inborn errors of metabolism and cancer.

His scientific contributions include pioneering new ways to study altered metabolism directly in cancer patients. This has allowed his team to uncover the mechanisms by which tumors use nutrients to produce energy and to identify metabolic pathways that allow tumors to grow and spread. The approach provides researchers with insights impossible to obtain from conventional experiments in cultured cancer cells and is now being used to study metabolism in nearly a dozen forms of human cancer.

The DeBerardinis laboratory discovered that lung tumors can utilize lactate as a fuel source, a finding that challenges a nearly century-old observation known as the Warburg effect that considered lactate to be a waste product of tumor metabolism. The finding opened new avenues for the study of potential therapeutics as well as new imaging techniques in lung cancer – the world’s leading cause of cancer deaths.

An international leader in research on cancer metabolism, Dr. DeBerardinis was named a Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Investigator in 2018. In 2020, he was elected to the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), one of the highest honors in the fields of health and medicine, and in 2021 he received the Paul Marks Prize for Cancer Research from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Dr. DeBerardinis succeeds Helen Hobbs, M.D. – one of the world’s foremost experts on human genetics – who has capably led the McDermott Center since 2000. Dr. Hobbs will remain actively engaged in research.

Dr. DeBerardinis’ work embodies the McDermott Center's mission, and his significant contributions to the field uniquely position him to drive innovation and discovery.

Please join me in congratulating Dr. DeBerardinis on his new leadership role at UT Southwestern.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

W. P. Andrew Lee, M.D.

Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
Dean, UT Southwestern Medical School

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