

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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James McGill Professor and Minda de Gunzburg Chair
Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology

*Annual Report prepared by Gayle A. Shinder, PhD, Chair's Senior Advisor for
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Foreword by the Chair

The Department of Oncology celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2020. To showcase the vibrant history of the Department an article was written ([McGill Oncology – Traveling through time, looking back and seeing the future](#), by **Gayle A. Shinder** and **Eduardo L. Franco**) and posted on the home page of the new Department website which was launched in early 2020 (www.mcgill.ca/oncology). In addition, a [video](#) was created and the link was posted on the Department website and social media platforms. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, three events that were to be part of the 30th anniversary celebration were put on hold: (i) a fundraising event in collaboration with the Canada-Pakistan Affiliated Chamber of Trade (CPACT) which was to be held on April 5, 2020; (ii) a resident-organized symposium; iii) a Public Lecture in collaboration with the Goodman Cancer Research Centre.

The 4th Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology Symposium and Awards Ceremony was held on December 1, 2020. The event was held virtually via Zoom with livestreaming on YouTube. The webcast is available for viewing at <https://youtu.be/eKEcvloif48>. This year's Distinguished Lecturer was **Bernard Lapointe** who presented on the History of Palliative Care at McGill and in Quebec. Departmental merit awards were presented to **Peter Siegel** (Research or Clinical Service), **Koren Mann** (Teaching and Mentorship) and **Majid Ghahremani** (Academic, Clinical or Research Support). **Vera Hirsh** was the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award. There was also a special presentation of the Female Champions of Cancer Education, Research, and Care (in partnership with the Canada-Pakistan Affiliated Chamber of Trade –CPACT and South Asian Women Association of Canada - SAWAC) which was originally slated for the CPACT fundraising event. The recipients of the award were: **Nicole Beauchemin**, *For her enduring legacy as scientist, mentor and teacher of the fundamentals of cancer research*; **Carolyn Freeman**, *For her decades-long, vigorous leadership in improving the quality of cancer care in Quebec*; and **Anna Towers**, *For her international leadership developing lymphedema treatment services for cancer patients*.

I created two task forces to address pressing needs in cancer control and care both locally and globally:

1. **The McGill Task Force on the Impact of COVID-19 on Cancer Control and Care** is chaired by **Wilson Miller**. The goal of this task force is to prepare a contingency plan to mitigate risks for individuals with cancer in the McGill health network. Data (previous years to the present day) focusing on various aspects of cancer-related services across the network is being collected to determine which activities associated with cancer screening and care have been suppressed or altered due to the pandemic and how this has affected outcomes.
2. **The Task Force on Global Oncology** is chaired by **Tarek Hijal**. The mandate of this task force is the development and implementation of a vision for global oncology education, research, policy, and service. I created this task force in response to a broader call for action in global health from the Faculty's School of Population and Global Health, and we will share information with them regarding the task force's activities.

We continued our popular "Focus on Faculty" profile series which I began in June 2015. This year there was a heavier focus on basic cancer research due to busy clinician schedules as they adapted to hospital changes as a result of the pandemic. The following faculty members were profiled: Basic Cancer Research (**Antonios Koromilas**, **Julia Burnier**, **Alexandre Orthwein**, **Marc Fabian**, **Jian Hui Wu**, **Raquel Aloyz**, **Michel Tremblay**); Cancer Genetics (**Patricia Tonin**); Head and Neck Oncology (**Michael Hier**); Lung Cancer (**Linda Ofiara**); Psychosocial Oncology (**Zeev Rosberger**); Radiation Oncology (**Joanne Alfieri**)

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As of 2020 the Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology and the Rossy Cancer Network (RCN) have an agreement whereby the Department Chair's Office will take over coordination of the RCN's Cancer Care Quality and Innovation (CQI) Research Fund and Education Fund (Skills Enhancement Grant and Kuok Fellowship) competitions. In November a Call for Applications was announced for the 2020 Edition of the CQI Research Fund with January 15, 2021 as the deadline for submissions. In 2021 the Department will work on implementing a new round of Skills Enhancement Grants and a Kuok Fellowship competition.

In the 2019 Annual Report I mentioned that the Department hired a Senior Data Analyst **Farzin Khosrow-Khavar**, to assist Department members and their trainees with the design, execution, analysis, and reporting of cancer research studies. He has been working on a number of projects with Department faculty members and has been assisting with Rossy Cancer Network projects. He will be leaving the Department sometime in 2021 and we are in the process of looking for his replacement.

On the subsequent pages we report just a small fraction of the many accomplishments of our large Department which has over 200 faculty members

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Chair, Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology

Summary of Department Activities

1. Research and Publications

Cancer-related research, teaching and clinical care are conducted throughout McGill and its affiliated hospitals, namely at the Goodman Cancer Research Centre, the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) including the Cedars Cancer Centre and the MUHC Research Institute, the Jewish General Hospital (JGH) including the Segal Cancer Centre (Lady Davis Institute), St. Mary's Hospital Center (SMHC) and at the Department's headquarters located at 5100 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West, Suite 720. Cancer-related research activities at McGill include:

- Basic research focusing on understanding at the molecular, cellular, and tissue levels the development and growth of tumours and their resistance to therapy;
- Translational research for the development and testing of novel therapeutics; biomarkers, and molecular signatures as targets for cancer detection or treatment;
- Phase I, II and III clinical research studies testing the efficacy of new cancer treatment therapies;
- Radiation physics studies to improve the delivery of radiotherapy;
- Genetic studies of inherited susceptibility to cancer;
- Epidemiological studies of the etiology, prevention, screening, and prognosis for several cancers;
- Psychosocial research aimed at improving the emotional well-being and quality of life of cancer patients and their families, and managing pain and other symptoms of the disease;
- Health systems research aimed at improving the quality of cancer care and clinical outcomes.

Publications (full list: <https://www.mcgill.ca/oncology/about-department/annual-reports>)

Keynote Speaker

- **Eduardo Franco:** 12th Arab Health Obstetrics & Gynecology Conference, Dubai, United Arab Emirates (January 28, 2020); 2nd Annual Convention of Northeast India Academy of Science and Technology & International Seminar on Recent Advances in Science and Technology, Mizoram, India (November 16, 2020) (held online)

Major Funding (our researchers are successful in earning many grants but these are special)

- **Martin Chasen** and colleagues – 1.4 million from Health Canada - Health Care Policy and Strategies Program for the RELIEF (Remote Self-Reporting of Symptoms by Patients with Palliative Care Needs) study.
- In a news release, the Government of Canada announced that it will be contributing up to \$6.7 million to the biotechnology company, Arch Biopartners, as its lead drug candidate, Metablok (LSALT peptide) will be tested on hospitalized COVID-19 patients. LSALT peptide was developed by **Stephen Robbins** and **Donna Senger** and their team at the University of Calgary. Both recently have been appointed to the Gerald Bronfman Department of Oncology, and Dr. Robbins will serve as the Director of the Lady Davis Institute at the Jewish General Hospital
- **Lucy Gilbert** - 6.24 million Genomics Applications Partnership Program (GAPP) funding grant to finalize the development of the screening test, DOVEgene (Detecting Ovarian and Endometrial cancers Early using genomics)
- **Shirin Enger** - \$1.3 M grant from the CIHR Collaborative Health Research Projects program to develop a non-invasive positron detector for medical imaging.
- **Catherine Goudie** - \$1 million grant from TD Ready Challenge for her application, MIPOGG (McGill Interactive Pediatric OncoGenetic Guidelines).

COVID-19 and Cancer

- **Jian Hui Wu** – Funding from Health Canada to use various assays to screen the approved drug database of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in order to evaluate the best candidates which could be used against COVID-19.
- **Janusz Rak** received funding from the McGill Interdisciplinary Initiative in Infection and Immunity (MI4) for the project, Exosomal mimetics of COVID-19 as viral models and therapeutics.
- **Nathaniel Bouganim** and **Jamil Asselah** are involved in a pan-Canadian project which allows those who have been exposed to or test positive for COVID-19 to search for COVID-19 clinical trials (www.covidtrials.ca). The project was started by **Ramy Saleh**, a former trainee in the Department's Medical Oncology Residency Training Program.
- **Arielle Elkrief, Nathaniel Bouganim, Gerald Batist, Donald Vinh**– leading the Canadian chapter of the COVID-19 and Cancer Consortium (CCC19).
Paper in the Lancet: *Clinical impact of COVID-19 on patients with cancer (CCC19): a cohort study*
- **Eduardo Franco** – CIHR funding for a project to study the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer prevention, screening, and care
- **Nathaniel Bouganim** and his team published a research letter in JAMA Oncology regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on lung cancer treatment at the MUHC

2. Clinical Innovation

- To reduce the number of people in the waiting room, during the pandemic, **John Kildea** led the effort to implement an SMS-based check-in system for patients in Radiation Oncology at the MUHC. Patients were able to check in from their cars in the parking lot. This was reported in the Montreal Gazette: <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/muhc-has-taken-measures-to-treat-cancer-patients-safely-during-pandemic/>.
- **Shirin Enger** finalized the intensity modulated brachytherapy applicator prototypes for prostate, cervical and rectal cancers.

3. Teaching and Learning

- Launch of the Graduate Diploma in Oncology in September – 8 students registered in the inaugural year. Courses conducted by Zoom due to pandemic.
- Department now offers graduate courses with the launch of six ONCO courses:
 - ❖ ONCO 610 D1/D2 Fundamentals of Oncology and Cancer Research (6 credits)
 - ❖ ONCO 615 Principles and Practice of Clinical Trials (3 credits)
 - ❖ ONCO 620 Best Practices in Biomedical Research (3 credits)
 - ❖ ONCO 625 Quality Improvement Principles and Methods (3 credits)
 - ❖ ONCO 630 Oncology Practicum (3 credits)
 - ❖ ONCO 635 Qualitative and Psychosocial Health Research (3 credits)
- Work underway to create interdisciplinary Master's and PhD programs.
- Medical and Radiation Oncology Residency Training Programs have been working hard preparing for an Internal Review in 2021. **Victoria Mandilaras** (Medical Oncology) and **Joanne Alfieri** (Radiation Oncology) have been working hard to ensure a successful review.
- MORE sessions have been restructured to include mock tumour boards, as suggested by residents and attending physicians.
- Visiting Speakers Program in Oncology – Adapting to COVID-19 pandemic
 - ❖ January and February speaker tours were in-person. May, July, October, November speaker tours were virtual.
 - ❖ Registration via new online portal

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- ❖ Speakers were from Canada, USA, Netherlands and Germany
- ❖ Talks on lung cancer, lymphoma, renal cell carcinoma, hepatocellular carcinoma, melanoma, esophageal and gastric cancer, clinical trials.

4. Involvement in the Community

- **Julia Burnier:** Save Your Skin/Ocumel Melanoma Patient Advocacy Program – Global Symposium Scientific guest speaker (virtual November 2020).
- **Nicole Beauchemin:** Community outreach for the Cancer Research Society and the Goodman Cancer Research Centre; Presented a one hour talk on World Cancer Day, Feb. 4 2020.

5. Milestones

Promotions and Tenure

- **Shirin Enger** – Granted tenure and promoted to Associate Professor
- **Argerie Tsimicalis** - Granted tenure and promoted to Associate Professor
- **Jason Agulnik** – Promoted to Associate Professor
- **Susie Lau** – Promoted to Associate Professor
- **Thierry Muanza** – Promoted to Associate Professor

New Appointments Approved by the Departmental Leadership Council

- **Stephen Robbins** – Professor - (Basic Cancer Research).
- **Donna Senger** – Associate Professor - (Basic Cancer Research)
- **Khashayar Esfahani** – Assistant Professor, CAS-Clinical (Medical Oncology)
- **James Man Git Tsui** – Assistant Professor, CAS-Clinical (Radiation Oncology)
- **Ipshita Prakash** – Assistant Professor, CAS-Clinical (Surgical Oncology)
- **Stephanie Wong** - Assistant Professor, CAS-Clinical (Surgical Oncology)
- **Yannick Poirier** – Assistant Professor, CAS-Professional (Medical Physics)
- **Sylvie Bouchard** – Faculty Lecturer, CAS-Clinical, Part-Time (Medical Oncology)
- **Najwa Buhlaiga** – Faculty Lecturer, CAS-Clinical (Medical Oncology)
- **Aurelie Garant** – Assistant Professor, CAS-Clinical (Radiation Oncology)
- **Caroline Reinhold** – Associate Member (Diagnostic Radiology)
- **Thomas Duchaine** – Associate Member (Basic Cancer Research)
- **Peter Nugus** – Associate Member (Course Instructor ONCO 635)
- **Shen Li** – Associate Member (Hematology-Oncology)
- **Paz Polak** – Adjunct Professor (Cancer Genetics)
- *Outaouais*
 - ❖ **Suzy Bendellali** – Faculty Lecturer (Medical Oncology)
 - ❖ **Pierre-Yves McLaughlin** – Faculty Lecturer (Radiation Oncology)
 - ❖ **Shelly Sud** – Faculty Lecturer (Medical Oncology)
 - ❖ **Steven Tisseverasinghe** – Faculty Lecturer (Radiation Oncology)
- **Issam El Naqa** – Adjunct Professor (Medical Physics)
- **Michel Wissing** – Affiliate Member (Cancer Epidemiology)

Other Appointments

- **Miguel Burnier** - appointed Interim Executive Director and Chief Scientific Officer of the Research Institute of the MUHC

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- **Armen Aprikian** – Clinical Lead of the Rossy Cancer Network. Replacing Wilson Miller who served in that role since 2014.
- **Carmen Loiselle** - Dialogue McGill’s new Principal Investigator
- **Koren Mann** – Graduate Program Director
- **Victoria Mandilaras** – Program Director of the Medical Oncology Residency Training Program, replacing **Lawrence Panasci** who had been serving as Acting Director and who, during his many years at McGill, has served as program director multiple times and collectively for more than 10 years.
- **Valerie Panet-Raymond** - Director for Oncology Undergraduate Medical Education, replacing **Jamil Asselah** who served in this role with much dedication for the last 10 years.
- **Joanne Alfieri** promoted to Associate Chair for Education.

Departures

- **Donna Stern** (Retired)
- **James Ashley Davidson**

Obituaries

- **Susan Solymoss** passed away on May 20, 2020. She was an Associate Professor in the Departments of Medicine and Oncology and a hematologist at St. Mary’s Hospital and at the MUHC.
- **Kappy Flanders** passed away on June 27, 2020 at the age of 81. Kappy was a champion for palliative care and in 1994 established the Eric M. Flanders Chair in Palliative Medicine at McGill in honour of her late husband.

Years Of Service Milestones- 2020

15 Years Lorenzo Ferri Polymnia Galiatsatos Belinda Nicolau Golda Tradounsky Josie Ursini-Siegel	20 Years Petr Kavan Bernard Lapointe Carmen Loiselle Jan Seuntjens	25 Years Paul Allison Jocelyne Feine William Parker Raghu Rajan Stéphane Richard Simon Tanguay	30 Years Sharon Abish Denis Cournoyer Jean-Pierre Farmer Eduardo Franco Antonis Koromilas
35 Years Gerald Batist Nicole Beauchemin Philippe Gros Michael Pollak	40 Years Lawrence Panasci	45 Years Michael Thirlwell	

6. Honours, Awards and Prizes

- **Thierry Alcindor**
 - ❖ Named as the Sarcoma Track Leader of the Scientific Program Committee for the 2021 meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology
 - ❖ Named as a member of the ESMO Faculty in Gastrointestinal Cancers.

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- **Mark Basik** – Appointed President of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Cancer Research Society. Replaces **Michel Tremblay** who served in that role for three years.
- **Pnina Brodt** - Alumni Award of Distinction for Lifetime Achievement from the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Medicine
- **Shirin Enger**
 - ❖ Canada Research Chair in Medical Physics, CIHR, Tier 2
 - ❖ CRC, Jean Poliot prize for the best paper. Another paper selected as editor's pick
- **William Foulkes** – Prix du Québec's Wilder-Penfield Prize for biomedicine
- **Nada Jabado**
 - ❖ Dr. Chew Wei Memorial Prize in Cancer Research from the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Medicine
 - ❖ Canada Research Chair in Pediatric Oncology, CIHR, Tier 1
- **John Kildea and Tarek Hijal**
 - ❖ Oncopole's Priorité patient Competition for their Opal patient portal app project, OncoBuddy et OncoConseil
 - ❖ Prix Banque Nationale 2020–Innovation et soutien à la communauté from the Quebec Breast Cancer Foundation
- **John Kildea** – John R. Evans Leader's Fund from CFI
- **Carmen Loiselle** -
 - ❖ Award from the Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO) for Best Publication in the Canadian Oncology Nursing Journal
 - ❖ Elected Fellow, Canadian Academy of Nursing
- **Sylvie Lambert and Peter Nugus** – Recipient of Oncopole's Innove-Onco Competition for their project on integration of patient-reported outcomes in cancer care
- **Koren Mann** - Associate Editor of the widely read environmental health journal, Environmental Health Perspectives
- **Wilson Miller** - Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences
- **Balfour Mount** - Canada Post has created a stamp in honour of Dr. Balfour Mount for his ground breaking work in palliative care and whole person care
- **Morag Park** – Distinguished James McGill Professor
- **William Parker** - Fellow of the Canadian Order of Medical Physicists (COMP)
- **George Shenouda** - 2020 Best of ASTRO abstract
- **Peter Siegel** - John R. Evans Leader's Fund from CFI
- **Ivan Topisirovic** – FRQS – Chercheurs boursiers Senior