President of UCLA Health named Honorary Medical Co-Chair at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge

It is a privilege to welcome Johnese Spisso, MPA, President of UCLA Health and CEO of the UCLA Hospital System to serve as the Honorary Medical Co-Chair at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge. As the Hirshberg Foundation and the LA Cancer Challenge commemorate 25 years of research progress and patient support for the pancreatic cancer community, we are appreciative of our deep partnership with UCLA Health.

Johnese Spisso joins Dr. John Mazziotta, Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences and CEO of UCLA Health, to serve as co-chair for the LA Cancer Challenge. **This joint honor captures the holistic approach to patient support and research that have been tenets of the Hirshberg Foundation's partnership with UCLA.** Since 1997, the Hirshberg Foundation has emphasized patient care alongside research, investing in treatment that span the bench to the bedside. Today, the Hirshberg Laboratories at UCLA closely collaborate with the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases, a center of excellence for patient treatment and care.

"It is an honor to have both Johnese and Dr. Mazziotta join us at the LA Cancer Challenge for our landmark year. Bringing together doctors and patients, families and healthcare leaders has been my dream. We are stronger when we work together and learn from each other's experiences," wrote Agi Hirshberg, Founder and President of the Hirshberg Foundation.

As we commemorate 25 years, we celebrate our progress, our determination and our partnership with UCLA. We are proud to honor Johnese Spisso and Dr. John Mazziotta as they lead the

UCLA Health team at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge.

“Agi and the Hirshberg Foundation have been invaluable partners over the past 25 years. Serving as co-chair with Dr. Mazziotta is an honor and symbolizes the partnership between research and patient care that is a cornerstone of UCLA Health, and we couldn’t have done it without the support of the Hirshberg Foundation. I look forward to celebrating with the pancreatic cancer community on October 23, 2022,” said Johnese Spisso.

“The LACC allows our doctors to meet the families who are fundraising for a cure, lets the fundraisers cheer for the 3-, 5-, and 10-year survivors. It is a day of joy and some tears but most of all, a day of hope,” said Hirshberg. **Join Agi, Johnese, Dr. Mazziotta and the pancreatic cancer community at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge on October 23rd at UCLA.**

Johnese Spisso assumed the position of President of UCLA Health, CEO of UCLA Hospital System and Associate Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences in 2016. She is a nationally recognized academic healthcare leader with more than 30 years of experience, and oversees all operations of UCLA’s hospitals and clinics as well as the health system’s regional outreach strategy.

Before coming to UCLA, Spisso spent 22 years at UW Medicine in Seattle, Washington, where she was promoted from Chief Nursing Officer to Chief Operating Officer to Chief Health System Officer and Vice President of Medical Affairs for the University of Washington. She served in the latter role from 2007-2016 and was responsible for the two academic medical centers, two community hospitals, the network of community clinics, and the Airlift Northwest flight program. While there, Spisso played a major role in expanding collaborations with regional hospitals and in the operational integration of two major community

hospitals into UW Medicine. She also was instrumental in leading the development of a statewide trauma system.

Prior to UW, as a registered nurse, Spisso rose through the ranks over 12 years at the University of California, Davis Medical Center and directed the critical care, trauma and burn center, emergency services and the Life Flight Air-Medical Program. Before that, she began her career as a critical-care nurse in the medical, surgical and transplant intensive care unit at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Presbyterian.

Spisso received a master's degree in health care administration and public administration from the University of San Francisco, and a bachelor's degree in health sciences from Chapman College. She earned her RN at the St. Francis School of Nursing. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on healthcare leadership, and she serves on several national boards, including the American Association of Medical Colleges' Council of Teaching Hospitals and Health Systems.

Spisso is active in community leadership and has served as the Los Angeles Community Chair for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society Light the Night Walk as well as the Los Angeles Community Chair for the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women Luncheon. She has received numerous awards and recognition throughout her career, recently being named to Modern Healthcare's Top 25 Most Influential Women Leaders in 2019, LA Business Journal's 500 Most Influential Leaders in Los Angeles in 2020, Modern Healthcare's Top 50 Clinical Leaders of 2020 in the U.S., and the Los Angeles Business Journal Women of Influence Award for Health Care in 2021 and 2022.

The Hirshberg Laboratories at UCLA

As we commemorate 25 years of progress in the field of pancreatic cancer research, we take a moment to reflect on where we started. When the Hirshberg Foundation was established in 1997, it was organized around five mission pillars. To date, we have accomplished 4 of those 5 goals, with “a cure” being the final piece.

One mission pillar is

To create a premier Pancreatic Cancer Center where all needs of pancreatic cancer patients can be met in one location with the most advanced treatment options.

The work of our UCLA Labs is bringing that goal to life. Learn more about the collaboration and progress happening at our UCLA laboratories.

Watch Our UCLA Labs Video →

Just a few months after Ronnie passed away from pancreatic cancer, Agi connected with the doctors who had treated him to establish a research program at UCLA. In February 1998, the Ronald S. Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory was opened, the first lab dedicated solely to pancreatic cancer research. Shortly thereafter, the Basic Research chair was created and Dr. Enrique Rozengurt was appointed to this distinguished position. In 2019, with the recruitment of Dr. Miklos Sahin-Toth, the Hirshberg research

centers at UCLA grew to encompass three laboratories.

These three laboratories are located in the same building, with two of the labs side-by-side to generate new ideas and foster collaboration. The research being done at these labs is also shared and directly applicable to patients being treated through the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Cancer Diseases. This deeply collaborative, integrated approach to holistic patient care was a dream in 1997. Thanks to the tireless efforts of researchers, donors, physicians, families, supporters and entire extended network of Hirshberg Foundation family, this dream is now a world-renowned reality.

The mission pillar of a "premier pancreatic cancer center" has guided our work. The progress that has been made through research at the UCLA Labs has influenced pancreas-focused institutions across the globe, and has driven research towards a cure. After 25 years of milestones, we are more committed than ever to our motto "Never Give Up: Finding a Cure is Worth Fighting For."

Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences to serve as Honorary Medical Chair at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge

As the Hirshberg Foundation and the LA Cancer Challenge commemorate 25 years of advancing research and providing patient

services for the pancreatic cancer community, we are grateful to partner with UCLA Health and welcome Dr. John C. Mazziotta as our Honorary Medical Chair.

When the Hirshberg Foundation was established in July of 1997, it was in partnership with doctors and researchers at UCLA. The Ronald S. Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory was opened shortly thereafter in February 1998. The Hirshberg research centers at UCLA have grown to include three laboratories that collaborate amongst each other and with the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Cancer Diseases. **This deep partnership with UCLA is why it is such a distinct honor to recognize Dr. John Mazziotta and have him leading the UCLA Health team at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge.**

"I look forward to marking 25 years of fighting towards a cure with my friend Dr. Mazziotta by our side. It is an honor to have him participating in the LA Cancer Challenge," said Agi Hirshberg, Founder and President of the Hirshberg Foundation.

In reply to our invitation, Dr. Mazziotta wrote, "I have long admired and commend the work of the Hirshberg Foundation. Their partnership has helped establish UCLA as a premiere pancreatic cancer center and we are deeply grateful for their longstanding support. It is a true privilege to be the Honorary Medical Chair for this landmark year of the LA Cancer Challenge. I look forward to leading our UCLA Health team, see you there!"

"We have made such progress and I am confident that our momentum and hard work will carry us to the finish: a cure! I have happy tears just thinking about all the hugs and faces I will see at this year's event," said Agi Hirshberg. **Join Agi, Dr. Mazziotta and the pancreatic cancer community at the 25th LA Cancer Challenge on October 23rd at UCLA.**

Dr. John C. Mazziotta has been Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health

Sciences and CEO of UCLA Health since 2015. A member of the David Geffen School of Medicine faculty since 1983, Dr. Mazziotta also has served as Dean of the medical school, Associate Vice Chancellor of UCLA Health Sciences and Executive Vice Dean. In addition, he was chair of the Department of Neurology and founding director of the Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center.

Dr. Mazziotta earned his MD and PhD in neuroanatomy and computer science from Georgetown University. Following an internship at Georgetown, he completed neurology and nuclear medicine training at UCLA.

Dr. Mazziotta has published more than 260 research papers and eight texts. He has received numerous awards and honors, including the Oldendorf Award from the American Society of Neuroimaging, the S. Weir Mitchell Award and the Wartenberg Prize of the American Academy of Neurology, and the Von Hevesy Prize from the International Society of Nuclear Medicine. Dr. Mazziotta has been elected to the National Academy of Medicine and the Royal College of Physicians.

Momentum Newsletter: Summer 2022

This summer is filled with optimism as the Hirshberg Foundation commemorates 25 years of making progress towards a cure. We know that there is still work to be done. However, we must pause to acknowledge the advancements that have been made, to honor the lives we have lost, and to redouble our efforts to support those

families faced with a pancreatic cancer diagnosis. This summer we celebrate 25 years of providing our community with hope, and we invigorate our efforts towards a cure!

25 Years of Progress

This summer marks 25 years of our relentless pursuit of a cure for pancreatic cancer. As we reflect on the milestones we have achieved, our 25th anniversary motto guides the path ahead: “Never Give Up! Our journey continues with an end in sight.” In 1997, just months after Ron Hirshberg passed away, Agi and her family created the five pillars of the Hirshberg Foundation’s mission. To date, we have accomplished 4 of those 5 goals, with a cure being the last pillar left to attain. Over the next few months, we will be sharing the milestones we have accomplished thanks to your support. Learn more about our 25th Anniversary with our video and join us in never giving up!

Watch Video →

UCLA Activity Summary Report

A pillar of our mission statement is to create a premier pancreatic cancer center where the needs of patients can be met in one place. That goal is a reality at the UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases. Our longstanding partnership with UCLA is working to develop and disseminate the most advanced treatment options, not only to patients at UCLA but across the country. These efforts include the UC Pancreatic Cancer Consortium (UCPCC) which unites 5 UC campuses in order to accelerate progress; new clinical trials at UCLA; our Tissue Bank that provides assistance and collaboration across the globe; and our renowned psychosocial care through the Simms/Mann

Center for Integrative Oncology. Our latest UCLA Activity Summary Report highlights the work from our flagship center as well as the collaborations taking place to expand excellence in care to all pancreatic cancer patients.

Read the Report →

Latest News & Research

This year has been filled with exciting news. The UCLA Hirshberg Center was recently recognized as a Clinical and Academic Center of Excellence for Pancreatitis and Pancreatic Cancer by the National Pancreas Foundation, a prestigious designation that speaks to the outstanding, holistic care being provided. It is an accomplishment for the entire UCLA team and a marker of the progress we are making. The UC Pancreatic Cancer Consortium has connected researchers at UC Davis, UC San Francisco, UCLA, UC Irvine, and UC San Diego to collaborate on research and clinical trials to accelerate the treatment options available to patients. Three of the UCs in the UCPCC have also been awarded grants from Canopy Cancer Collective to help improve the outcomes and well-being for all patients with pancreatic cancer. This grant will support the UCLA Hirshberg Center in expanding the exceptional level of care to all UCLA Health facilities, which extend from San Luis Obispo to Laguna Beach, CA.

Support these outstanding updates →

The 25th LA Cancer Challenge 5K is October 23, 2022

Not only is it the 25th Anniversary for the Hirshberg Foundation, it is the 25th Annual LA Cancer Challenge 5K

Walk/Run. The LACC is the event that started it all and encompasses our mission pillar to “unite generations, young and old, through physical fitness to raise awareness for pancreatic cancer.” The LACC began as a way to make a difference as a community, and thanks to the tireless support from our participants, teams, volunteers and sponsors, we’ve made great strides towards a cure. Join us in-person at UCLA or virtually from wherever you are, and know that your participation helps make our accomplishments possible. In our 25th year it’s more important than ever to for us to “Never Give Up! Let’s Fight to the Finish!”

Register Today →

Pivotal research on RNA splicing may hold key to treatment

As we celebrate summer and all that is blooming, we look back at seeds planted through our Seed Grant Program, and are optimistic about the progress being made in pancreatic cancer research. Our 2019 Seed Grant cohort faced a difficult year for conducting research, establishing their labs and providing updates. We are catching up with these great scientists to share their progress and advances in pancreatic cancer research.

When Luisa F Escobar-Hoyos, MSc, PhD, applied for a Seed Grant in 2019, she was a Senior Post-Doc at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Shortly after receiving her award, in February

2020, she became an Assistant Professor of Therapeutic Radiology and Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry at Yale. Despite the pandemic severely impacting the establishment of her lab, she and her team continued to publish and their discoveries led to a new therapeutic modality for pancreatic cancer. Dr. Escobar-Hoyos is making great strides to cure pancreatic cancer, most notably through the discovery that pancreatic cancers are highly susceptible to a range of therapies directed at RNA splicing.

A majority of pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma (PDAC) tumors are driven by mutations in the KRAS gene that increase the activity of KRAS driving cell growth and survival. A large subset of these tumors (70%) also have mutations in the TP53 gene but efforts to inhibit or drug these mutant proteins have largely failed. More recently, it has been shown that a specific group of mutations in TP53, called hotspot mutations, combined with high expression of genes involved in RNA splicing are markers of aggressive PDAC. RNA splicing is a process where one gene can produce many different forms of a protein and involves a number of RNA splicing proteins. Dr. Escobar-Hoyos's recent work, published in Cancer Cell, aimed to investigate if and how mutant TP53 and RNA splicing co-operate in pancreatic tumor cells. They found that mutant p53 hijacks RNA splicing to favor the production of proteins that stimulate KRAS to promote tumor growth and metastasis. Based on these findings, Dr. Escobar-Hoyos's lab developed and patented a new therapy for pancreatic cancers that harbor mutant KRAS and mutant p53, which corrects the RNA splicing errors, selectively killing pancreatic cancer cells in animal models.

This remarkable discovery, that oncogenic KRAS is susceptible to inactivation through the inhibition of RNA splicing, led Dr. Escobar-Hoyos to submit a patent for this type of therapy. The patent relates to a method for treatment administering an anti-sense oligonucleotides (a small piece of modified RNA) that

block the splicing of cancer-related genes, thereby treating the cancer. This novel therapy, Splicing-Hit Oligonucleotide Therapy (SHOT), is currently being tested in Dr. Escobar-Hoyos's lab. As pancreatic tumors often don't respond to treatment, the hope that SHOT will be effective in tumors that are resistant to current therapies. Dr. Escobar-Hoyos is currently working with the Yale Cancer Center on a clinical trial to test this novel form of therapy for pancreatic cancers.

We applaud the work of Dr. Escobar-Hoyos and her lab and are hopeful that her discovery helps pave the way to a cure. As Dr. Escobar-Hoyos writes, "thank you for your support and I hope that [the Foundation] funds other pancreatic cancer scientists!" We are honored to fund Seed Grants and, thanks to your support, look forward to continuing our progress.

The 2021 UCLA Activity Summary Report

The Hirshberg Foundation remains a key partner in UCLA's pancreatic cancer program. The UCLA Agi Hirshberg Center for Pancreatic Diseases is a world-class integrated practice unit where researchers and physicians work together to advance the understanding and treatment of pancreatic cancer while being able to bring improved therapies directly to patients. Thanks to the generosity of the Hirshberg Foundation and our donors, the UCLA Hirshberg Center team was able to continue advancing research, share their discoveries with the scientific and patient communities, and make progress toward a world free from pancreatic cancer.

Each year, UCLA provides the Hirshberg Foundation with a detailed report of the progress that is possible thanks to our partnership. Below are updates on the important work taking place at UCLA.

UC Pancreatic Cancer Consortium

The UC Pancreatic Cancer Consortium (UCPCC) brings together the five UC campuses with medical schools – Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco – to unite pancreatic cancer scientists and clinicians in order to accelerate the progress and impact of their work. This highly collaborative model seeks to improve the lives of persons diagnosed with pancreatic cancer by translating innovative research into improved clinical care.

Clinical Trials for Treatment

Patients seen through the Hirshberg Center's Integrated Practice Unit (IPU) in Westwood have access to an array of treatment options including robust slate of 14 clinical trials, 5 of which are currently enrolling patients. One such trial tests the use of NGM120, a long-acting monoclonal antibody, in combination with other therapies in patients with metastatic pancreatic cancer. Another trial evaluates GRT-C903 and GRT-R904, a neoantigen-based therapeutic cancer vaccine, in combination with immune checkpoint blockade, in patients with pancreatic and other cancers. Living with Pancreatic Cancer, run by Dr. Annette Stanton, seeks to identify the psychological and social factors that help people living with the disease and partners/primary caregivers maintain their quality of life. These clinical trials not only help advance understanding of this disease, but they also offer patients and their families hope for better treatment options.

Ronald S. Hirshberg Chair in Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research

Dr. J. Enrique Rozengurt holds the Ronald S. Hirshberg Chair in Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research and remains one of the globe's most vital medical researchers. He is Distinguished Professor of Medicine in the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, Chief of Research in the UCLA Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Division of Digestive Diseases, and a pioneer in the areas of signal transduction and cell growth regulation.

Over the past year, Dr. Rozengurt and his colleagues have found that statins potently block YAP-regulated genes in pancreatic cells and that various statins inhibit the development of pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma (PDAC) cells when acting synergistically with metformin, an FDA-approved medication for Type 2 diabetes, prediabetes and other conditions. Dr. Rozengurt's team is investigating whether a low-dose combination of metformin and statins can work in harmony to slow the production of pancreatic cancer cells, which may help to arrest the spread of pancreatic cancer. The use of metformin as a potential inhibitor of pancreas tumor growth has the possibility of rapid translation because of metformin's already widespread use.

UCLA Pancreas Tissue Bank

David Dawson, M.D., Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, continues to oversee the UCLA Pancreas Tissue Bank. The Tissue Bank provides invaluable pathologic consultations to colleagues at UCLA, as well as collaborating

with pancreatic researchers nationally and internationally. The bank continues to grow as Dr. Dawson accrues additional snap frozen and viable tissue samples from patients, archival clinical materials, and large tissue microarrays of pancreatic tumors. Support from the Hirshberg Foundation plays a key role in enabling Dr. Dawson to provide tissue samples and offer his expertise in pathology to his collaborators, creating a multiplier effect as resources and support at UCLA benefit the wider pancreatic research community. Dr. Dawson is also primary investigator for the pathology core of the UC Pancreatic Cancer Consortium, which collaborates across five UC campuses to accelerate the progress and impact of pancreatic cancer.

Ronald S. Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory

The Ronald S. Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory, helmed by Guido Eibl, M.D., Professor, Department of Surgery, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, investigates the connection between inflammation, diet, and obesity in pancreatic cancer. Dr. Eibl and his team continue to make tremendous progress on their $5.75 million five-year grant from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to study the impact of obesity on pancreatic cancer development, as well as the effect of treatment with statins, both alone and in combination with metformin. Drs. Eibl and Rozengurt continue to collaborate on additional projects as well, including a study investigating the role that the combination of obesity and stress have on pancreatic cancer development. As stress, particularly social stress, affects the lives of more and more individuals, it is vital to study its effects on pancreatic cancer risk. Dr. Eibl and his team continue to drive research towards a greater understanding of how this disease develops, with actionable ways

to limit risk and slow the development of pancreatic cancer.

Psychosocial Care Via the Simms/Mann–UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology

Under the direction of Kauser Ahmed, Ph.D., Darcie Denkert Notkin Director of Psychosocial Oncology, the Simms/Mann-UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology remains a key part of UCLA Health's multifaceted approach to providing cancer patients with holistic care. When longtime clinical psychologist and pancreatic cancer patient liaison Elizabeth Cleary, Ph.D., transitioned into a remote role, Greg Flaxman, L.C.S.W., M.P.H., stepped in to ensure that pancreatic cancer patients continued to receive all the center's integrative care options. Mr. Flaxman has an active part in counseling patients after their diagnosis to help craft personalized psychosocial care plans as they prepare for surgery, chemotherapy, or other treatments. He helps patients with pancreatic cancer and their families navigate their care and connects them to resources that will ease the challenges of a pancreatic cancer diagnosis and treatment.

The Simms/Mann team is dedicated to providing guidance and support through the cancer journey, with pancreatic cancer patients averaging nearly nine interactions during the course of their treatment. The Simms/Mann Center experienced a nearly 13 percent increase in the number of pancreatic cancer patient encounters in 2021, further proof of the team's value to a vulnerable population. In addition, the growth of telehealth throughout the pandemic has coincided with the geographic growth of the Simms/Mann Center, which now offers services at 19 UCLA hematology/oncology clinics across Southern California,

increasing opportunities for patients to easily access crucial psychosocial services at locations closer to home. Pancreatic cancer continues to be one of the most difficult diagnoses for patients to receive, and the generosity of the Hirshberg Foundation allows the Simms/Mann Center to keep these patients' particular needs at the forefront of the work they do.

The Hirshberg Foundation's partnership with UCLA has created a premiere pancreatic cancer center with cutting-edge research and world-class care that draws patients from across the country. Together we are making progress toward improved treatments, outcomes, and quality of life for patients with pancreatic cancer. The past 25 years have laid the groundwork, now we are ready to watch research accelerate and discoveries compound to bring new hope to families and better outcomes to patients.

Read the full summary here.