

November 13, 2024

Dear Friend of Merkel Cell Carcinoma Research,

I want to start off by simply saying thank you. We are fortunate to have a community of supporters who champion our work, participate in clinical trials and studies, and support us philanthropically. Thank you for your help in driving discoveries that will improve the lives of patients and families coping with Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC) now, and in the future.

I am delighted to share an update on our lab's work from the past year, the progress you are making possible, and an exciting announcement about our future.

### **Advances in overcoming immunotherapy resistance**

One of the major questions we want to answer is why some patients respond to immune checkpoint inhibitors and others do not. Our team discovered that the level of cancer-fighting immune cells in the blood of MCC patients can predict how well a treatment works, with higher levels of circulating anti-cancer immune cells leading to a better response. We are now working on determining whether this information can be used to boost a patient's existing anti-tumor T cells, as well as to create a clinical test.

### **Calculating recurrence risk**

Our team has created a 'recurrence risk calculator', accessible for free by any patient, physician, or family member online. This tool uses factors such as time since diagnosis, sex, immune status, and cancer stage to tell a patient the chance of their cancer recurring. This helps clinicians to create more personalized surveillance plans for each patient. This calculator can be found on the website we maintain, [merkelcell.org/recur](https://merkelcell.org/recur).

### **Assisting MCC patients across the country**

Our lab continues to serve as a center for MCC care discussions and referrals. Our team leads a weekly multi-disciplinary MCC patient case discussion board where clinicians are invited to review and discuss individual cases. Over the past year, 209 patient cases from 29 states and 6 countries were discussed, resulting in recommendations for treatment and enrollment in clinical trials. This tumor board is primarily organized and supported by our two full-time clinical research fellows whose positions are entirely funded through philanthropy.

### **Merkel CELLebration 2024**

Over 200 guests from around the globe joined the Nghiem Lab, in person and virtually, in September for our annual Merkel CELLebration dinner. Guests learned about advances in the lab and clinic, shared inspirational stories, toured the lab, and chatted with lab members who presented posters. If you missed it, scan the QR code to the right to watch a recording.



**Save the date for next year's event: Monday, September 9, 2025!**

### **Our team has Skin in the Game**

The lab participated in our first Obliteride fundraiser by forming team Skin in the Game. Obliteride is Fred Hutch Cancer Center's annual bike ride and 5k walk/run fundraising event. Twenty-five lab members participated and raised more than **\$35,000** for our research thanks to our amazing MCC donor community!



### **New MC3 Institute**

We are thrilled to announce that we have established the Merkel Cell Carcinoma Collaborative (MC3) Institute, which will serve as a focal point for MCC research happening at Fred Hutch, UW Medicine, and beyond. We will continue to lead the way in research and clinical care in a structure that better connects us to our 100+ MCC collaborators in Seattle and around the world. The MC3 Institute will allow us to share resources, including access to data and samples; support junior scientists and clinicians; advocate for patient needs; and provide the best MCC clinical care.

**Save the date: MC3 Institute launch event on January 27, 2025, at our South Lake Union campus!**

### **Personal updates**

My wife, Stephanie, and I enjoyed having our younger son, Max, home from college all summer long as he completed an intensive Japanese language program. We also found time for a relaxing cruise in Alaska. Max is now back for his second year at Stanford, where he is studying math, computer science, and Japanese while playing ultimate frisbee. My older son, Alex, continues to live in New York City and work at Duolingo, which he greatly enjoys.

This was also an exciting year for me to lead UW Dermatology, as it was our first as an independent Department at UW Medicine — a change that will help with recruitment and increasing MCC awareness. The year went remarkably well, with eight new faculty members joining us from around the US.

### **Deepest thanks**

As I close this letter, my heart is full. I am grateful for all that our lab and extended team are able to accomplish, leading to better treatments and outcomes for MCC patients not only in the Seattle area, but worldwide. I know that these accomplishments simply would not be possible without your partnership. We are grateful for you!

If you ever have any questions about how your support can advance our efforts, please email our partners on the Fred Hutch Philanthropy team, Megan Little at [mlittle2@fredhutch.org](mailto:mlittle2@fredhutch.org) and Sherri Dotson at [sdotson@fredhutch.org](mailto:sdotson@fredhutch.org). If you would like to continue your support of our research, you can make a donation directly to our lab by visiting [fredhutch.org/support-merkel-cell](https://fredhutch.org/support-merkel-cell).

Sending warm wishes for a happy holiday season,



Paul Nghiem, MD, PhD  
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*The team at this year's Merkel CELLebration in September*