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Two at U-M to study breast cancer therapies

Ann Arbor -- Two University of Michigan researchers have been tapped to join a team sharing an \$18 million grant to study breast cancer therapies.

"We've made significant progress in our understanding of the molecular basis of cancer. Now, we need to bring this knowledge to clinicians and move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to cancer treatment," Dr. Arul Chinnaiyan, director of the Michigan Center for Translational Pathology, said in a statement.

Chinnaiyan and Dr. Max Wicha, director of the U-M Comprehensive Cancer Center, join 11 other researchers nationwide in a three-year study funded by Stand Up to Cancer, "the Entertainment Industry Foundation's charitable initiative supporting groundbreaking research aimed at getting new cancer treatments to patients in an accelerated time frame," according to its Web site.

The project is expected to examine issues related to three major types of breast cancer -- estrogen-receptor positive, HER2-positive and triple negative -- "to develop innovative, less toxic therapies with the potential to improve the treatment outcomes for women with this disease," university officials said.

Part of the project will also focus on cancer stem cells, which Wicha's lab found in breast tumors, according to U-M.

"The goal of all our existing therapies has been to kill as many cells within the tumor as possible. The current model may lead to treatments limited in their effectiveness, because we have not been targeting the most important cells in the tumor -- the cancer stem cells. If we hope to cure more cancers we will need to target and eliminate this critical type of cancer cell," Wicha said in a statement.