

Planning for the UNKNOWN

Recent, far-reaching increases in our understanding of cancer have positioned us for major strides in prevention and treatment in the decade ahead. The foundations for many recent transformational insights—as well as the prospects for their applications—rest upon sound planning and the often under-appreciated impact of scientific serendipity.

It might seem contradictory to say that CCR, or any other research organization, can plan for unexpected experimental or clinical results. Yet the ability to plan sound hypothesis-driven science and anticipate several prospectively predictable outcomes, while still remaining flexible enough to recognize unanticipated findings of often greater value, is at the core of good science.

In CCR, we realize that meaningful advances in cancer research do not happen by random chance, but by building and sustaining an innovative environment with potential to scale up to big science when necessary, to foster team science when appropriate, and to empower individual researchers when they demonstrate exceptional creativity. The ability to recognize valuable outcomes, both predictable and unexpected, is also a necessity.

Therefore, in addition to supporting solo investigators, our culture of interaction and innovation encourages interdisciplinary research teams to bring together their highly specialized skills to address difficult problems, while recognizing the value of anticipated and unanticipated outcomes. Our approach is to promote collaborations between our labs and clinics and with others around the globe to move the most promising discoveries into improved diagnostic and treatment strategies as quickly as possible. Because serendipitous findings may fuel



(Photo: B. Branson)

Robert Wilttrout, Ph.D.

important and rapid advances in science, we often use our flexibility in funding mechanisms to follow unexpected, but promising leads wherever they appear. In that sense, CCR's scientific planning and culture of innovation provide a novel environment and philosophy for preparing researchers for tomorrow's unknowns.

This issue of *CCR connections* showcases some of the fruits that we are already reaping from our innovative environment—namely, unexpected results. Whether it is Mary Carrington, Ph.D., discovering how seemingly unrelated research focus areas—HIV infections and

cervical cancer—actually inform one another, Stefan Ambs, Ph.D., M.P.H., identifying a distinct interferon-related gene signature in the prostate tumors of African-Americans, or Ying Zhang, Ph.D., generating a mouse model to study the function of Smurf2 only to discover that this protein may play a role in preventing tumor formation, the theme is the same: Planning and innovation accelerate progress in cancer research, and the ability to recognize value in unexpected findings accelerates progress even more.