

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Ann Rife Cox Chair in Gynecology

Memorial Endowment Creates a Lasting Impact

The Ann Rife Cox Chair in Gynecology at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center honors its namesake by providing support to its chair holder—a faculty member engaged in research for gynecologic cancers, including ovarian, uterine and cervical cancer.

Ann's husband, Ed Cox, glows as he leafs through the 50-plus page report of contributors to the Cox Chair. "Everybody who met Ann loved her," he says as he scans the more than 400 gifts made to the endowment established in his wife's memory in 1984. Thirty years after its establishment, the market value of the Cox Chair has nearly doubled. This was made possible, in part, through the philanthropy of Ann and Ed's children who have given generously to the endowment over the years. Indeed, as a gift for his 90th birthday, Ed's children made additional contributions to push the endowment past its initial target value.

The Cox Chair has supported some of the top ovarian and breast cancer researchers for 30 years, and has contributed to groundbreaking research since its inception.

Creighton Edwards, M.D., the first faculty member to be awarded the position, was among the first doctors to recognize the importance of reconstructive surgery following successful therapy for gynecological cancers, which is standard of care today.

David Gershenson, M.D., the holder from 2000-2004, performed cutting-edge clinical and translation research of rare ovarian tumors.

Gordon Mills, Ph.D., chair holder from 2004 through 2010, advanced the understanding of tumors on a molecular level and is now a worldwide leader in the development of personalized cancer therapy.

The current chair holder, Robert Coleman, M.D., has developed a 'translational pipeline' through which therapeutic discoveries are moved from the lab to the clinic—and back.

Dr. Coleman is thrilled with the research he is able to support through the endowment. "I'm incredibly grateful to the Cox family," he says.

"The endowment allows us to take on projects that have potential to turn into much bigger things. We're able to consider exploratory, high-risk, high-reward projects, which are otherwise very difficult to fund through other mechanisms. These projects can lead to huge breakthroughs."

Funding from the Cox Chair also helps to support the infrastructure of his clinical trials team. It has helped catalyze the development of a mobile app that helps match patients with clinical trials for which they are eligible. "This app will help patients and health care providers understand what treatment options are available," Dr. Coleman notes.

Supported in part by the Cox Chair, Dr. Coleman is excited about Epharna™, an investigational new drug that inhibits the expression of specific genes. In pre-clinical trials, Epharna has successfully delivered gene-silencing medication, shutting off cancer-catalyzing genes without doing damage to healthy cells.

"Targeted gene silencing is a completely new therapeutic technology with potential to revolutionize not just cancer treatment, but the way we treat a number of other diseases," says Dr. Coleman. The first in-human clinical trial is scheduled to start in the first quarter of 2015.

Thanks to the Ann Rife Cox Chair in Gynecology, which continues to benefit from gifts both modest and major, scientific advances are leading to major breakthroughs in cancer treatment.



The Ann Rife Cox Chair in Gynecology allows for exploratory research that can lead to tremendous breakthroughs, says Robert Coleman, M.D., the current chair holder.