

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is with very heavy hearts that we need to let you know that Wei Zhao, M.D., Ph.D. passed away on November 20 as a result of primary lung cancer and subsequent metastasis.



1993



1998



recent

Wei was born June 22, 1955 in Fuling, Sichuan Province, China. In 1978, she began her professional training as a student in Chongqing University of Medical Sciences and received her M.D. degree in 1983. Wei remained at Chongqing for the next three years of internship and residency in Pediatric Hematology, followed by several years of research and clinical practice while serving on the Faculty of Children's Hospital, Chongqing University. In 1989, UNICEF presented Wei with an award as an outstanding pediatrician and researcher, which enabled Wei to move to the US to continue her investigations as an International Research Scholar. At the Medical College of Georgia, Wei first worked in the laboratory of Dr. T.H. Huisman at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta (1989-1991). This prolific period resulted in five first author publications on hemoglobin disorders. Next, as an M.D. Post-doctoral Research Associate in the lab of Dr. D.C. Hess, Wei co-authored two publications on ICAM-1 expression in brain endothelial cells and then two additional publications in the lab of Dr. N.H. Sarkar on mouse mammary tumorigenesis.

Wei moved to Birmingham and joined our UAB lab team in 1993, supported by the Basic Mechanisms in Virology Training Grant. Her studies focused on discovering the basis of transcriptional regulation of the human papillomavirus enhancer-promoter for early gene expression, using monolayer cells to mimic wound healing and organotypic raft cultures grown at the liquid medium / air interface to recapitulate stratified, differentiating epithelia. Wei published four seminal papers in which she identified a suite of enhancers and silencers and also epigenetic control over differentiation-dependent E6 and E7 gene transcription. These have remained key contributions to the understanding and appreciation of HPV - host cell interactions. For this exceptional research, Wei received her Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics in 1998.

Parker, J.N., **W. Zhao**, K.J. Askins, T.R. Broker and L.T. Chow. 1997. Mutational analyses of differentiation-dependent human papillomavirus type-18 enhancer elements in epithelial raft cultures of neonatal foreskin keratinocytes. *Cell Growth & Differentiation* 8: 751-762, plus the journal cover.

Zhao, W., T.R. Broker and L.T. Chow. 1997. Transcriptional activities of human papillomavirus type-11 promoter-proximal elements in raft and submerged cultures of foreskin keratinocytes. *Journal of Virology* 71: 8832-8840.

Zhao, W., L.T. Chow and T.R. Broker. 1999. A distal element in the HPV-11 upstream regulatory region contributes to promoter repression in basal keratinocytes of squamous epithelium. *Virology* 253: 219-229.

Zhao, W., F. Noya, W.Y. Chen, T.M. Townes, L.T. Chow and T.R. Broker. 1999. Trichostatin A up-regulates HPV-11 URR-E6 promoter activity in undifferentiated primary human keratinocytes. *Journal of Virology* 73: 5026-5033.

Concurrent with her bench research in our lab, Wei studied very intensively for the American Medical Board Exams and passed them with flying colors, enabling her to practice medicine in the US.

Following graduation, Dr. Zhao became a post-doctoral research fellow in the laboratory of Professor Donald M. Miller, M.D., Ph.D. (UAB Departments of Medicine: Hematology/Oncology and Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics, and the Comprehensive Cancer Center). Thereafter, Wei completed a residency and fellowship (with certification by the American Board of Pathology) in Pathology at UAB. Her program director Dr. Bruce Alexander notes: “she was a very successful resident who had the respect of faculty and peers. Her scholarly contributions continued during her residency ... a model for all trainees. We are truly saddened by this news and this loss to Medicine.”

Wei Zhao then embarked on a Clinical Fellowship in Pathology at the University of Louisville and in the James Graham Brown Cancer Center where in 1999 Dr. Donald Miller had been appointed as Director. Following that advanced training, in 2004 Wei was appointed as an Assistant Professor of Pathology at the University of Louisville. Since 2006, Wei had been working as a Pathologist for the Laboratory Corporation of America in Louisville, Kentucky.

Wei is survived by her son Eric Xilu Chen, who graduated from the University of Michigan in 2011. Eric decided to follow his mother’s career path and is now in his Fourth Year at the University of Louisville School of Medicine. Wei has been blessed with the loving and devoted attention of her husband Wolfgang Zacharias, Ph.D. whom she met when he was on the UAB Faculty in Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics. Wolfgang is a Professor of Medicine at the University of Louisville and in the Brown Cancer Center, with a joint appointment as Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology.

Notes to Wolfgang and Eric can be sent to their home address:
611 Lake Forest Parkway
Louisville KY 40245

Contributions in memory of Wei can be sent to the University of Louisville James Graham Brown Cancer Center, Development Office, 529 South Jackson Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202.



1997

We are grateful for the opportunity to have enjoyed Wei’s friendship, though for far too short a time.

Tom Broker and Louise Chow
Professors of Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics