

Reelin' for Research

Tony Montana Fellowship in Pediatric Cancer Research

Q&A:

1) What is a fellowship?

A fellowship is post residency subspecialty training for a physician who has already completed training in a primary area, such as pediatrics or medicine.

A doctor will go to 4 years of college, then 4 years of medical school, then do 3-4 years in an internship and residency of a medical specialty, like pediatrics, adult medicine or surgery.

After these years as a resident, they can apply to be a “fellow” and take more training in a medical subspecialty specialty, such as oncology (cancer), hematology (blood), endocrinology or a host of other choices. Once complete our fellows will be board certified in both Pediatrics and Pediatric Hematology/Oncology.

2) What does a Fellow do?

A fellow spends his time learning the art and science of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology. Specifically a fellow will spend one year doing clinical work – attending to patients, educational conferences and learning the art of talking to families and children with chronic and severe illnesses. They work on the ward, in clinic and in the bone marrow transplant unit. Afterwards they begin a minimum of two years doing research in a particular area of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology – this can be research in a lab or clinical research. Many areas are open for investigation such as bench research (working in the lab studying many different processes) or clinical or translational research in areas such as palliative care or integrated medicine. These two years are concentrated research years.

3) How does the monies raised by Reelin' for Research impact pediatric cancer research as a whole?

Reelin' for Research dollars are training the next generation of physicians in pediatric oncology and hematology. Without these much needed funds, we would not be able to train folks to carry on this area of medicine in the future. Discovering why cancer happens, finding better therapies for cancer, and how better to treat our patients and families both during and after treatment, are several potential areas of research. The research that the fellow does is individualized to their areas of interest.

4) Why should someone give to support a fellow versus giving directly to the hospital or cancer center?

This is an investment in the future of cancer treatments for children and without it the field would grow stagnant. New fellows are needed to carry on the work of the division of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology and to ensure the care of children with cancer improves with each generation. A fellow will work to develop and learn new things and spread his or her learning to other physicians, hospitals, and areas of cancer.

BACKGROUND

When the Tony Montana Fellowship was started at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Division, the inaugural recipient was Dr. Ana Sanchez. She has graduated our program and now is an attending physician in South Florida. Her area of interest is palliative care in Pediatrics (ie how to deal with serious illness for the patient, family and staff, pain control, quality of life, end of life issues) and has published important papers in this area. She has investigated and published about barriers to hospice care for children in North Carolina and on the current status of hospice care in our state. Hospice care in children is very different than in adults and is a much misunderstood and underserved area. Ana has presented her work at a national meeting, and has also worked with a committee at UNC that is starting a palliative care service at UNC's Children's Hospital.