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PRESSE RELEASE

Friday June 29th 2012

International cancer expert appointed to create a centre of excellence unique in Europe

The University of Lausanne (UNIL) and Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV) are stepping up the fight against cancer with the appointment of Professor George Coukos. This renowned specialist will combine medical care and research to offer patients personalized treatments of the highest caliber. A new research laboratory will also be created to design the immune cells of the future.

Hailing from Philadelphia, where he set up the Ovarian Cancer Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania, George Coukos is at the age of 50 one of the leading figures in cancer immunotherapy and an international expert in gynecologic cancers. His arrival on 1st July 2012 in Lausanne will unite within a new CHUV-UNIL Oncology Department (operational from 1st January 2013) a wealth of expertise that will constitute a centre of excellence in oncology unique in Europe. It will offer individual treatments to patients and a combination of existing and new chemo- and radiotherapies, new personalized molecular therapy and immunotherapy.

Combining medical care and research in a spirit of innovation, this centre of excellence will develop by integrating multiple existing skills and recruiting new international experts in several types of cancer. The UNIL-CHUV department will include CHUV services in the fields of medical oncology, radio-oncology, hematology and bone marrow transplants. It will also incorporate the Ludwig Centre for Cancer Research of the University of Lausanne which carries out cutting-edge research in the field of immunotherapy and which will be directed by George Coukos. The new department will in addition work with all other oncology nursing staff to form centers of excellence in different types of cancer. This integrated approach to the disease will optimize patient treatments. Eventually, several clinical practitioners and researchers will join the team headed by George Coukos, who has been appointed as a Full Professor at the Faculty of Biology and Medicine of the UNIL. "Based on a molecular and cellular diagnosis of each tumor, therapeutic choices will be made with a view to pushing back existing boundaries through a combination of approaches," he explains.

In addition, there will be close collaboration with the ISREC (Swiss Institute for Experimental Cancer Research) and other EPFL teams, as well as with pharmaceutical partners in order to speed up and increase the number of clinical trials. "These multiple associations will allow us to offer CHUV patients the most innovative therapeutic approaches," remarks the Professor. "We will have access to the latest medicines developed by partners in the pharmaceutical industry, in immunotherapy and in all technologies developed in laboratories in the Lake Geneva region or through international collaboration. With radiotherapy and the most advanced surgery, CHUV patients will benefit from innovative and personalized multi-disciplinary treatments."

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"A new molecular approach directly targeting the tumor is essential," emphasizes George Coukos, who wants to make the CHUV-UNIL Oncology Department a major site for these clinical trials in Switzerland and Europe. He also intends to develop vaccine-based and genetic immunotherapy, which reconfigures the patient's immune cells to help the latter recognize and combat the tumor. A new clinical laboratory will be created to produce these immune cells of tomorrow. The focus is on so-called translational research – through the biology of cancer, the development of new therapies, molecular imaging – which addresses each patient in order to understand their disease and administer the most effective clinically-tested treatments emerging from laboratories. "This close collaboration between clinical practitioners and biologists will give us a better understanding of the mechanisms of cancer and allow us to design a new, personalized therapy," continues the Professor.

The aim of this global approach is to prolong the life of patients and improve its quality, as is already the case today, but also to cure more patients with the emphasis on personalized treatment. "We're going to be able to cure more and more people suffering from cancer," concludes George Coukos.

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