

# S'pore scientist wins coveted US award

Oncologist receives \$50,000 Young Investigator Award

By VICTORIA VAUGHAN

A LOCAL scientist has won a coveted American cancer research award, becoming the first Singaporean to get the \$50,000 fund, which is normally given out to Americans.

Dr Daniel Tan, 31, received the Young Investigator Award from the American Society of Clinical Oncology (Asco) Cancer Foundation.

He will use the money to fund the first year of a study looking at why some cancer drugs work better for certain patients.

"I thought it was a long shot as consultants in London told me the award was hardly ever given outside the US. I had already applied, not knowing how low the odds were," said Dr Tan, who has been an oncologist for two years at the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS).

Since the foundation started giving out the award in 1984, it has been won by 572 young investigators, with only one of the previous recipients hailing from Asia.

The head of the NCCS' medical oncology department, Dr Toh Han Chong, said: "There are a lot of young investigators doing interesting cancer research. That one of our chaps received the award is testimony to our international standing."

Oncology, or cancer research, is Dr Tan's chosen speciality as it combines his passion for research with patient interaction.

He will split his time between treating patients and working in the lab, where he has four scientists helping him out.

His research will build on results from a clinical trial at his centre, yet to be published, which looked at cancer of the lining of the nose – nasopharyngeal carcinoma.



Dr Tan wants to study why some cancer drugs work better for certain patients. He hopes his work will contribute to the field of personalised medicine. PHOTO: NATIONAL CANCER CENTRE SINGAPORE

## BEATING THE ODDS

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This form of cancer is more prevalent among Asians. There are about 400 cases each year in Singapore.

"An interesting observation was that some patients are more responsive to the

drugs than others and I wanted to find out why," said Dr Tan.

He will look at the treatment in question, a class of drug called tyrosine kinase inhibitors which can target the molecular circuit within a tumour and switch it off.

Dr Toh explained why he thought the proposal had been a winner: Nose cancer is not well known in the West although it is prevalent in China and across South-east Asia.

"We have felt for the longest time that it's a Cinderella cancer that was neglected. Not many drugs have been investigated for this cancer," he said.

Dr Tan hopes his work will result in better-designed trials, and contribute to the field of personalised medicine, where patients receive treatments tailored to their specific make-up and needs.

"Hopefully we will get to a day where we can select patients who are much better suited for experimental treatment to maximise the benefit from the drugs," he said.

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