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NEWS RELEASE

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Texas-based START and Cancer & Hematology Centers of Western Michigan open the first comprehensive Phase I oncology clinical trials program in Grand Rapids

This is START's second US-based site. Cancer patients in Western Michigan and throughout the Midwest now will have access to the latest anti-cancer therapies.

SAN ANTONIO, TX (October 30, 2015)— San Antonio-based [START](#) (South Texas Accelerated Research Therapeutics) and [Cancer and Hematology Centers of Western Michigan](#) (CHCWM) today announced the opening of the first comprehensive Phase I oncology clinical trials program in Western Michigan, and it will operate under the START banner. [START Midwest](#) is the fifth in START's global network of Phase I clinical research sites, which currently includes two centers in Madrid, one in Shanghai and START's flagship site in San Antonio, which opened in 2007. START Midwest is START's second US-based site, and will offer advanced cancer patients first-ever access to investigational, Phase I medicines.

With centers located around the globe, START conducts the world's largest Phase I medical oncology program, putting more than 600 patients per year on Phase I trials. Patients travel from all over the world to participate in one or more of the organization's Phase I drug trials.

Like its predecessors, [START Madrid](#) and [START Shanghai](#), START Midwest will be fully representative of the program in San Antonio and will operate according to the same exceptional standard operating procedures and quality controls. START Midwest will be led by [Dr. Nehal Lakhani](#), and [Dr. Timothy O'Rourke](#). The site will be located at the CHCWM's 145 [Michigan Street location](#) and will begin accepting patients for Phase I clinical trials December 10.

START Midwest will bring the latest treatment options to cancer patients in Western Michigan and throughout the Midwest

Cancer & Hematology Centers of Western Michigan is one of the Midwest's largest and most prestigious cancer practices.

Today, more than 50 percent of cancer patients can be cured with conventional treatments – that is, therapies with a proven response rate. However, there are many patients who do not respond to standard treatment and may be eligible for participation in a Phase I clinical trial.

Presently, most patients in West Michigan who want access to early phase anti-cancer drugs have to travel to Ann Arbor, Detroit or Chicago. Now, late-stage cancer patients in Grand Rapids will have access to early phase medicines without having to travel.

START Midwest will help accelerate cancer drug development world-wide

START's model of locating Phase I centers in strategic locations around the globe allows for a profoundly different approach to oncology research that uses a round-the-clock system of integrated clinical trial research and makes the newest Phase I drugs available to advanced stage cancer patients who live in places where there is limited access to the newest anti-cancer drugs.

“Our mission is to accelerate the development of new therapies by taking the unique skills and unequalled expertise that has been cultivated at START and expanding it to other strategic locations around the world,” said [Dr. Anthony Tolcher](#), clinical director for START. “Cancer and Hematology Centers of Western Michigan is an ideal partner for START Midwest. Ninety-percent of all cancer patients receive all of their cancer care in community oncology practices like CHCWM and therefore these patients now have access to world class clinical trials in their own home town. Furthermore, the success of START has always been having the best phase I investigators and we are lucky to have Dr. Nehal Lakhani and Dr. Tim O'Rourke who have extensive training in phase I studies, already present in Grand Rapids.”

Dr. O'Rourke is an accomplished oncologist with more than thirty years of experience treating patients and enrolling patients on clinical trials. Prior to coming to West Michigan in 1996, Dr. O'Rourke practiced in San Antonio, Texas and was an investigator in the drug development program that developed into START.

Dr. Nehal Lakhani, MD, Ph.D., has extensive training and experience in Oncology drug development. He earned his Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Sciences (Pharmacokinetics) and performed fellowship training in Medical Oncology, both at National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD. He also worked at the Food and Drug Administration for 2 years prior to joining CHCWM.

According to Dr. Lakhani, the decision to partner with START was twofold. “For our oncologists who have vast academic interest and a long history of participating in Phase II and Phase III studies, the opportunity to provide patients in West Michigan early access to a drug that otherwise might not be available for years was profoundly compelling,” said, Dr. Lakhani.

“Currently, there are more truly innovative cancer drugs being developed than at any time in human history, due to better understanding of cancer biology and the promise of personalized medicine. But, less than 5% of all adult cancer patients participate in clinical trials. If more patients were to participate in clinical trials, we would be able to improve cancer care at a substantially faster rate for the future generations to come,” said Dr. Lakhani.

START's accelerated model of global Phase I research helps drugs get to market faster

In August, former President Jimmy Carter confirmed that he had been diagnosed with Melanoma and that the cancer had spread to his brain. Doctors said that the main drug he is being treated with is [Keytruda](#) -- a new class of cancer drugs which are labeled as “immunotherapy agents,” which work by using the body's own immune system to fight the cancer. Keytruda is considered a “game changer” in treating Melanoma and was tested first at START. Keytruda has been approved by the FDA for use in treating both melanoma and lung cancer.

START's researchers are among the rare individuals who can claim a direct, hands-on involvement with the clinical development of more than 19 anticancer drugs that, in the past 18 years, have obtained FDA approval and are now considered a part of standard of care. These drugs include Erlotinib (TARCEVA®), Gefitinib (IRESSA®), Sorafenib (NEXAVAR®), Panitumumab (VECTIBIX®), Temsirolimus (TORISEL®), Lapatinib (TYKERB®), Bortezomib (VELCADE®), Vorinostat (ZOLINZA®), Pemetrexed (ALIMTA®), Abiraterone (ZYTIGA®), Ixabepilone (IXEMPRA®), Cabazitaxel (JEVTANA®), Eribulin (HALAVEN®), Trametinib (MEKINIST®), Trastuzumab emtansine (KADYCLA®), Regorafenib (STIVARGA®), Ziv-Aflibercept (ZALTRAP®), Carfilzomib (KYPROLIS®) and Pembrolizumab (KEYTRUDA®).

South Texas Accelerated Research Therapeutics (START)

START's mission is to accelerate the development of new anticancer drugs for the purpose of improving the quality of life and survival for patients with cancer. START Madrid opened in 2008. For information on START visit www.startthecure.com. START operates four Phase I centers on three continents and, with centers located in Madrid, Spain, Shanghai, China and San Antonio, Texas, operates the largest, global, 24-hour Phase I medical oncology program, putting more than 600 patients worldwide per year on Phase I trials. START operates under the leadership of Dr. Anthony Tolcher, Dr. Amita Patnaik, Dr. Kyriakos Papadopolous, Dr. Drew Rasco and Gina Mangold.

About CHCWM

Cancer & Hematology Centers of West Michigan is dedicated to help, healing, and hope for cancer patients and their families. With offices in Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon, plus regional clinics in Ludington, Greenville, Fremont, Hastings and Reed City, CHCWM's 20 physicians and nearly 300 employees deliver cutting-edge cancer care close to home. In addition to the area's most highly trained and compassionate physicians, CHCWM serves patients and their families with a full range of support staff, including oncology-certified nurses, social workers, lab and pharmacy personnel, and a psychologist. For more information, please visit www.chcwm.com.

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