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2014-2015 Medical Dermatology Society Mentorship Summary

The Medical Dermatology Society Mentorship Award provided me with the outstanding opportunity to work with Dr. Youn Kim, who is one of the leading authorities in cutaneous lymphoma. Even before the mentorship period began, Dr. Kim was very receptive in working with me to arrange a rotation period despite her extremely busy schedule. I visited her before the period began and found her very welcoming and warm. We discussed small projects including one in which we would characterize dendritic cells in folliculotropic mycosis fungoides (MF) versus in other types of MF. This is a project that we are hoping to collaborate on even after my mentorship period.

During my time with Dr. Kim at Stanford, I was able to meet other members of the cutaneous lymphoma multidisciplinary group, including the research and clinical fellows that help Dr. Kim directly in her clinical trials and numerous research studies, the database specialists, nurse practitioners and collaborating radiation oncologists and bone marrow transplant specialists. I took part in her planning conferences that discussed each patient's disease and management before they were due in clinic and even listened in on a cutaneous lymphoma consortium meeting. The planning conferences were invaluable in understanding her rationale for choosing certain therapies over others depending on whether patients had Sezary Syndrome, mycosis fungoides, anaplastic large cell lymphoma or another lymphoma and depending on which stage disease patients had. In addition, it gave me perspective on how her clinical trials were organized and I was able to read through many of the trial protocols. We also viewed patients' biopsy samples with the dermatopathologists, which helped us understand the underlying pathological process and advise on treatment options and prognosis. Clinical trials included such novel therapies as mogamulizumab, brentuximab vedotin, CD8+ memory T cell donor lymphocyte infusions, topical HDAC inhibitors and others. Because of the novel nature of these treatments, it was fascinating to see some of the adverse effects patients experienced, several of which have not yet been reported.

Because of the collaborative and friendly environment, I was able to get to know her fellows on a day-to-day basis. We often had lunch together and went to meetings together. During clinic days, I was able to observe how master clinicians interact with their patients: educating patients on their disease's pathophysiology and prognosis, offering treatment options and guidance on choosing among them, and delivering both good and bad news. Dr. Kim was not only a cutaneous lymphoma specialist but also an excellent medical dermatologist. She gave me a number of clinical pearls on treating skin conditions that had little to do with cutaneous lymphoma. On top of this, Dr. Kim also provided me with one-on-one mentorship and career advice on my goal to become an academic medical dermatologist.

While at Stanford I was also able to participate in other medical dermatology clinics and educational activities. I shadowed Dr. Bernice Kwong in her supportive dermatology-oncology clinic (which addresses skin problems in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy or targeted therapies), Dr. Susan Swetter in her pigmented lesion and melanoma clinic, and Dr. Peter Marinkovich in his blistering diseases clinic. On Thursdays, I also took part in Stanford Dermatology's Grand Rounds, which were an excellent learning experience. These were divided between the Stanford Dermatology's primary Redwood City campus and Santa Clara Valley Medical Center's Dermatology Division location. The patient cases were very unusual or challenging. The input by dermatologists of different backgrounds added to the lively discussion and the comprehensive management strategies offered were very beneficial for patient care.

Needless to say, the MDS award provided me the eye-opening opportunity to learn more about an area in dermatology I am very interested in and gain first-hand experience on how a multidisciplinary program is set up to tackle a complex and difficult disease. Despite the short time, I feel that my development as a clinician was greatly enriched. The experience provided me with a great role model and motivation to one day also become a master clinician in medical dermatology.