The Cancer Biomarkers Conference

Pathologists Leading the Molecular Testing Discussion

Timothy Craig Allen, MD, JD

The Cancer Biomarkers Conference (CBC) was the inspiration of Philip T. Cagle, MD, who quickly recognized the amazing opportunities that would arise, and changes that would ultimately occur in cancer diagnosis and treatment, with our continuously increasing understanding of molecular pathology, and the exponential expansion of cancer biomarker testing and therapeutics. He organized the initial CBC with exceptional lecturers, which has continued with all the CBCs. The initial CBC was held on March 22, 2014, at the Houston Methodist Hospital’s Methodist Research Institute, situated in the Texas Medical Center in Houston, Texas. The initial CBC focused on predictive biomarkers and biomarker reporting, with lectures and discussion predominantly centered around lung cancer. The initial CBC attempted to recruit an audience predominantly consisting of pathologists and oncologists.

The CBC was so successful, and the appetite for up-to-date knowledge in the rapidly developing world of molecular diagnostics and therapeutics was so keen, that Dr. Cagle planned and executed a 2-day CBC II 2 years later, September 10 and 11, 2016, again at the Methodist Hospital’s Houston Methodist Research Institute. The initial CBC and CBC II focused on pulmonary neoplasia. However, with the significant growth of our molecular diagnostics knowledge, CBC II also featured lectures on the molecular diagnostics and therapeutics of other cancers, including melanoma, breast cancer, and hematologic malignancies, which were emerging areas of molecular diagnostics investigation and treatment development.

CBC III was held September 15 and 16, 2018, also at The Methodist Hospital’s Houston Methodist Research Institute, again populated with stellar lecturers and an expanding audience of stakeholders. The conference’s popularity continued to increase. Three things occurred following CBC III: as Dr. Cagle retired, he passed the CBC baton to me; the decision was made to expand the conference site outside of Houston; and the premeeting boot camp was added to the CBC agenda.

CBC IV was held in Saddle Brook, New Jersey, October 5 and 6, 2019. It was the first CBC to include a day-before boot camp. This first boot camp was for a half day; however, it was so successful that it has been expanded to a full day, occurring on the Friday before the weekend CBC meeting. The boot camp is unique; it does not involve continuing medical education, it is designed entirely by our vendor colleagues, and it is an amazing day of openly sharing ideas, concerns, and thoughts of stakeholders throughout the cancer community, including vendors, physicians, patients and families, and payers.

The pandemic required CBC V to be postponed for 2 years. It was held September 10 and 11, 2022, in Jackson, Mississippi. CBC V featured the first all-day Friday boot camp. CBC V included not only a locally recruited keynote address speaker who opened the conference on day 1, it also included the first Philip T. Cagle, MD Honorary Lecture which opened the lectures on day 2.

The boot camp and a 2-day slate of excellent speakers of national and international renown are scheduled to return for CBC VI at the David Rubenstein Forum in Chicago, Illinois, Friday, September 15 through Sunday, September 17, 2023. The continuing goal of the CBC is to provide significant value to all attendees, whatever their stakeholder status, to share ideas, perspectives, and thoughts with and among a diverse community of engaged attendees, and to have fun visiting with colleagues whom one sees precious little.

Here are 4 articles originating from the authors’ lectures at CBC V. I hope that these excellent articles and their diversity of topics will express the nature of the CBCs.

Yin Hung, MD, PhD, and Lucian Chirieac, MD, provide a timely examination of the genetic features and molecular testing in mesothelioma and other mesothelial lesions; Genevieve Crane, MD, PhD, provides an update on B-cell lymphoma biomarkers; Negar Taheri, MD, and Rondell Graham, MBBS, review how molecular discoveries have changed liver tumor pathology; and José Otero, MD, PhD, shares the cognitive framework behind modern neuropathology, which discusses, among other things, how to reach the underserved in resource-poor regions.

Note that while the CBC originated almost solely from lung cancer molecular pathology, none of these 4 articles from CBC V relate directly to lung cancer. There is much more to come!
Timothy Craig Allen, MD, JD, obtained his medical degree from Baylor College of Medicine (Houston, Texas) in 1984 and completed his residency in anatomic and clinical pathology, subsequently serving on the faculty of Baylor College of Medicine until 1995. He then attended the University of Chicago Law School (Chicago, Illinois) and graduated with the degree of Doctor of Law With Honors in 1998, subsequently practicing health care law and litigation. Dr. Allen completed a 2-year fellowship in pulmonary pathology in the Texas Medical Center (Houston, Texas) in 2004. Dr. Allen is professor and chair of the Department of Pathology at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine and chief of the Pathology Service Line for Corewell Health East. He has previously served as chair of the Department of Pathology at University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson, Mississippi, and director of the Anatomic Pathology at the University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas. Dr. Allen is a member of the Board of Directors of the College of American Pathologists (CAP) Foundation. He is a member of the Board of Directors and a member of the Academic Advisory Board of the Crime Prevention Research Center, and is a member of The National Association of Medical Examiners. Dr. Allen is certified by the American Board of Pathology in anatomic and clinical pathology, with added qualification in cytopathology. He is an associate editor of the Archives of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine. Dr. Allen is past president of the Pulmonary Pathology Society and past president of the Texas Society of Pathologists. He is a former governor of the CAP Board of Governors, where he was chair, vice-chair, or member of several CAP councils and committees. Dr. Allen currently serves as a member of the CAP Council on Membership and Professional Development and chair of the CAP Constitution and Bylaws Committee. He has authored and coauthored numerous articles and book chapters on pulmonary pathology and medicolegal issues and has coauthored and coedited several books on pulmonary pathology. Dr. Allen is series editor of the Molecular Pathology Library series.