

Cancer Neuroscience Program

Feb. 19, 2026 | Meeting Summary

The Cancer Neuroscience Program Lunch with Leaders event brought together faculty, donors and committee members to review recent scientific progress and underscore the essential role of philanthropy. Speakers shared an update on the first arm of UT MD Anderson’s oncolytic virus trial for glioblastoma patients, which was completed the night before the luncheon. Of the 21 patients treated, several experienced complete tumor responses — milestones made possible entirely through philanthropic support. Faculty introduced the NeuroHealth Initiative, an effort aimed at understanding why patients experience neurological side effects such as neuropathy and cognitive changes during cancer treatment. By collecting data from patients throughout their treatment, researchers hope to identify biological factors that influence these toxicities and eventually predict and prevent them. A major theme of the luncheon was the growing recognition that the nervous system plays a critical role in every cancer type — not just brain tumors. Researchers highlighted newly published findings showing how tumors can damage the myelin sheath that protects nerve cells, triggering inflammation that undermines immunotherapy. Additionally, cancer treatments themselves can harm myelin and contribute to long-term cognitive and neurological effects in survivors. The group also heard an update on a promising new compound designed to repair myelin by activating a key lipid-regulating complex in the brain and peripheral nervous system. Preclinical studies show the drug improves cognition, reduces pain and restores motor function, with no observed toxicity. The team is preparing for an FDA submission to move this therapy into clinical trials. Attendees engaged in discussion about clinical trial standards and FDA processes, weighing the need for rigorous evidence with the urgency of delivering innovative treatments — especially for rare or aggressive cancers. Faculty explained how approaches may differ across diseases and international regulatory systems. The program closed with expressions of gratitude for donor support and acknowledgment of UT MD Anderson’s leadership in the emerging field of cancer neuroscience. Participants were encouraged to help broaden awareness of the program’s impact, including through upcoming outreach events. Following the luncheon, committee members explored the latest CNP research from selected UT MD Anderson projects highlighted at the International Cancer Neuroscience Symposium.