

ALUMNI STORIES



Paul Kurywchak, Ph.D.

Executive Director
Skipper BioMed

Houston, TX

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
MDAnderson
Cancer Center

Making Cancer History®

Many saw the apple fall, but Newton asked *Why?*

Paul Kurywchak, Ph.D., is the kid that most grew up with that asked all the questions about how things work and why they break down. *Why is the sky blue? How do dogs' noses work? How does the human body work?* These were but a few of the questions he was curious about as a child. Like so many, Dr. Kurywchak has lost several family members and friends to cancer so he turned his natural curiosity and love for science into a career as a cancer researcher.

Dr. Kurywchak is a graduate of The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. He describes his time at MD Anderson as more than developing as a scientist. He learned how to conduct experiments, critically evaluate data, collaborate, stay self-motivated, think outside the box, become a confident communicator, and prioritize tasks. These skills are embedded into his daily life and work ethic.

Dr. Kurywchak is passionate about MD Anderson and its impact on his career. He describes MD Anderson as a place with a wealth of world-class expertise. He encourages everyone to take advantage of exposure to the knowledge of the MD Anderson faculty and to network with this group as much as possible. Dr. Kurywchak has remained in contact with his MD Anderson classmates, recognizing the importance of meaningful professional and personal relationships.

Dr. Kurywchak learned early in his career that no matter how well-prepared you think you are, not everything will go as planned. And that's a good thing. Keep your focus on the primary objective of your project, let your gut be the driver for picking your program and mentor, and when experiments fail – *and there will be a lot of failed experiments* – don't get discouraged. The excitement of one successful experiment can overshadow the disappointment of 20 failures.

Today Dr. Kurywchak is Executive Director for [Skipper BioMed](#) in Houston, Texas. Skipper BioMed is a research consultancy that provides services to academic and industry research groups developing novel lung or pancreatic cancer-focused technologies. What makes Skipper BioMed particularly unique is that it is privately funded by a U.S. family, so all the work they do is provided pro bono without asking clients for anything in return. Skipper BioMed helps research

groups achieve critical milestones through a range of services, including fundraising strategy and execution, business plan and technology development, and essential relationship development, all of which enable the technologies to translate into the clinic more rapidly. Skipper BioMed does not provide any funding to researchers themselves.

Their company name says it all. Skipper BioMed's clients are like a rock meeting resistance as it moves along the surface of a lake. Skipper BioMed's consultation services allow their clients to increase/maintain their momentum and helps them keep "skipping" along toward the realization of validated technologies and improved patient outcomes.

Current Employer

Skipper BioMed

Current Location

Houston, TX

Current Position

Executive Director

- Every day I get to provide pro bono consulting to researchers developing innovative technologies that will improve outcomes for lung and pancreatic cancer patients

Works of Interest

- [Systems Biology of Cancer Metastasis](#)
- [The emerging roles of exosomes in the modulation of immune responses in cancer](#)
- [Unique somatic variants in DNA from urine exosomes of individuals with bladder cancer](#)
- [An evolving function of DNA-containing exosomes in chemotherapy-induced immune response](#)
- [Detection of mutant KRAS and TP53 DNA in circulating exosomes from healthy individuals and patients with pancreatic cancer](#)

- [FN14 expression correlates with MET in NSCLC and promotes MET-driven cell invasion](#)
- [Elucidating potentially significant genomic regions involved in the initiation and progression of undifferentiated pleomorphic sarcoma](#)

Awards & Recognitions

- 2016 – National Institutes of Health T32 Training Grant in Cancer Biology
- 2013 – Top Ten Scientific Poster issued by AACR Eighth Annual Undergraduate Student Poster and Caucus Competition
- 2012 – Freeport-McMoRan Cooper & Gold Foundation Fellowship
- 2011 – C.W. and Modene Neely Charitable Foundation Fellowship

Mentors

“It would be really difficult to name just one mentor. [Isaiah Fidler, D.V.M., Ph.D.](#), [Valerie LeBleu, Ph.D.](#), and my Ph.D. mentor [Raghu Kalluri, M.D., Ph.D.](#), all had an enormous influence on me. I believe I was the last student to ever do a rotation in Dr. Fidler's lab, and it will be an experience that I will cherish forever. He was a pioneer in the field of cancer metastasis. Getting the chance to learn directly from my hero was an honor. Dr. Valerie LeBleu may be the hardest working person I've ever met in my life and instilled many lessons in me about taking advantage of the present. Dr. Raghu Kalluri was a great Ph.D. mentor that opened my mind to the opportunities outside of academic research and knew precisely how and when to provide direct guidance versus giving me space to grow and develop on my own.”

- **Isaiah Fidler, D.V.M., Ph.D.**, joined The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in 1983 as professor and founding chair of Cancer Biology, a department he led until 2008. Dr. Fidler held the R.E. ‘Bob’ Smith Distinguished Chair in Cell Biology. For many more years, he continued his academic pursuits and leadership responsibilities, which included his role as director of MD Anderson's Cancer Metastasis Research Center and Metastasis Research Laboratory. In 2019, Dr. Fidler fully retired and was appointed the prestigious title of professor emeritus until his death in 2020.

- **Valerie LeBleu, Ph.D.**, is currently a Scientific Director with InGenesis Inc, MD/MBA candidate at Northwestern Feinberg and Kellogg, and a former Assistant Professor in the Cancer Biology Department of MD Anderson Cancer Center.
- **Raghu Kalluri, M.D., Ph.D.**, is the current Frederick F. Becker Distinguished University Chair of Cancer Research, Professor and Chair of the Department of Cancer Biology, Director of the Metastasis Research Center at MD Anderson Cancer Center, Director of Science Operations and Management of James P. Allison Institute, Director of the Office for Training and Mentoring of Scientists, Associate Vice President of Discovery Science, co-director of the Medical Scientist Training Program and Assistant Dean of the GSBS at MD Anderson.

Family

“I’m a newlywed (April 2022) with four pups, which makes me a happy guy!”

Online profiles

- [LinkedIn](#)

MD Anderson program from which I graduated

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences
Ph.D., Cancer Biology – 2018

Academic area of specialization

Cancer Biology, characterizing exosomes and investigating their role in cancer progression



ALUMNI STORIES

Undergraduate school from which I received a degree

Arizona State University
B.S., Molecular Biology – 2013

High school from which I graduated

McClintock High School
Tempe, AZ – 2009

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