

Local group gives \$100,000 for children's brain tumor research

AVON LAKE

By Bryan Wroten

The Prayers From Maria Children's Glioma Cancer Foundation has awarded two \$100,000 research grants — one of them to MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland.

The foundation was created by Ed and Megan McNamara, of Avon Lake, after their daughter, Maria, was diagnosed with a diffused intrinsic pontine glioma. Maria, 7, passed away from the brain tumor July 14, 2007.

The two-year \$100,000 grant will fund the research of Dr. BingCheng Wang at MetroHealth, who is looking at how brain tumors spread. In his work, he said his lab has found a way to regulate a cell's migration. He and his researchers have been studying a family of proteins that can stop "egg cells" in tumor cells, which can be turned on to stop migration. The regulatory molecule has been previously involved in brain neuron cell migration, he said.

"It makes perfect sense to look at its role in brain tumors," he said.

This research has been funded for adult glioma patients, he said, but not for children. The \$100,000 grant will be used as seed money for preliminary data that will allow his lab to apply for larger grants for children's

glioma research.

"The funding from that foundation allows us to proceed," he said.

Ed McNamara said Prayers From Maria, www.prayers-frommaria.org, has a review board of oncologists from across the country, from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, brought together from when he and his wife consulted them about treatment for their daughter. They rate and rank grant applications based on the viability, practicality and medical reasoning of the proposal. In this case, the review board recommended the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston and MetroHealth.

"It was real excitement for us," McNamara said. "Some people think we chose Metro because they were local. Non-local doctors selected them. It's really amazing in itself. Top medical experts in the industry selected them, not me. I thought that was great."

The research Wang is doing has McNamara's support because it will involve testing on mice before moving to children test subjects. Though the Federal Drug Administration must approve all clinical trials, he said the lack of funding in children's research leads to using kids more often without mice testing.

"It's shocking when you realize what's going on out

there," McNamara said.

The research at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute will help identify the types of gliomas, he said. Most of the time, a glioma is only properly identified during post-mortem testing, during which he said many doctors realize it was a different kind than diagnosed. The institute has developed technology to take biopsies of the glioma for molecular testing for better identification.

"We're very proud of what's being done, and we're very excited" he said.

When the foundation began, McNamara said they had no idea they would raise the amount of money they have as quickly as they have.

"They said, 'If you fund the preliminary data, we can go after the National Institutes of Health of the world,'" he said. "It was like, wow, we can make a difference. Smaller foundations can make a difference. Here's a perfect example of why you can."

It's local money that made this possible, McNamara said. It's important for people to realize local money could make a difference nationally, he said.

"People don't realize they're actually having a major effect," McNamara said.

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