

Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures
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Nebraska Coalition
FOR LIFESAVING CURES

FINDINGS

SPRING 2017 NEWSLETTER

NCLC Honors Mary
Ann "Andy" Holland
at 15th Annual
Tribute Luncheon



Dr. Howard Gendelman and "Andy" Holland

The Nebraska Coalition for Life-saving Cures honored Mary Ann "Andy" Holland at its 15th annual tribute luncheon, Monday, April 24, 2017, at Happy Hollow Club.

Holland has been an active supporter of medical research in Omaha for more than a decade and a member of the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures board since 2007.

Her commitment to the Omaha nonprofit community has been felt through numerous board memberships and leadership roles including the University

of Nebraska Medical Center Chancellor's Board of Counselors, Girls Inc., Holland Children's Movement, Partnership 4 Kids and Tri-Faith Initiative.

Holland, who was introduced by 2015 honoree, Barbara Weitz, noted that the Coalition cannot look to its future without remembering why it was founded in the first place: "to promote public policy that supports all research."

She went on to say: "We must prevent policy that would ban certain types of research and harm the University of Nebraska, Omaha and the entire state of Nebraska. We must still be vigilant. Ever vigilant."

A touching moment

After receiving her Lifesaver Award from the Coalition, Holland introduced Howard Gendelman, M.D., the UNMC investigator whose Parkinson's disease research in 1999 used fetal cells. The fetal cell research launched a major controversy in Nebraska.

Dr. Gendelman has continued his Parkinson's research, and now 18 years later his research group achieved a major milestone last month when they found a drug that

transforms the immune system to produce diagnostic and therapeutic gains for people with Parkinson's.

The drug appears to allow the immune system to transform disease-inciting cells with Parkinson's into cells that protect and defend against brain injury.

Dr. Gendelman, professor and chair of the UNMC Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Neuroscience, told the audience how research protestors marched outside his home in 1999.

The protestors quoted a biblical passage that says whoever destroys a life, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world.

In light of his team's research milestone, Dr. Gendelman said he shouted back to the protestors, "You got it wrong. It is whoever saves a life, it is as if he saved an entire world."

In that spirit, he said forcefully, that "the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures saved our soul, the soul that defines what research is and in so doing, changed the world. For that we are forever grateful to all who have engaged as their mission and their tireless pursuits to do good for so many."

Dr. Oberley-Deegan Receives Maurer Scientific Achievement Award

Rebecca Oberley-Deegan, Ph.D., professor of biochemistry and molecular biology, received the Chancellor Emeritus Harold M. Maurer and Beverly Maurer Scientific Achievement Award at the 15th Annual Tribute Spring Luncheon sponsored by the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures.

Dr. Oberley-Deegan, who joined the UNMC faculty in 2014, was recognized for her research aimed at finding ways to protect normal tissues in the body from radiation damage when treating prostate cancer or cancer of the anus.

Some of the side effects of radiation include skin irritation, immune deprivation, susceptibility to infection, weight loss due to nausea, and damage to organs.

“As more people are surviving cancer therapy, the quality of life for these cancer survivors is often reduced due to radiation damage of normal tissues,” she said. “Currently, there

is nothing given to patients while undergoing radiation therapy to protect normal tissues. We are trying to address this problem with our research.”

Dr. Oberley-Deegan’s research group is focused on trying to inhibit radiation-induced free radicals, which are linked to tumor survival and metastasis. They are trying to determine the mechanisms by which antioxidants can protect normal tissues from radiation, while simultaneously making the tumor vulnerable to radiation damage. They hope to launch a clinical trial soon to test their research findings.

Dr. Oberley-Deegan earned her undergraduate degree from Grinnell College and her doctorate degree from the University of Iowa. She did her postdoctoral training at National Jewish Hospital in Denver. In 2016, Dr. Oberley-Deegan received a New Investigator Award from UNMC.

Each year at the Tribute Spring Luncheon, the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures honors individuals from Nebraska who have made a difference in the world through their passionate support of medical research.



Dr. Rebecca Oberley-Deegan speaking at the luncheon.

Internationally Known Stem Cell Researcher Speaks in Omaha



Dr. Rao

Internationally known for his research involving human embryonic stem cells and other somatic stem cells, Dr. Mahendra Rao was the featured speaker at a Lunch and Learn sponsored by the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures in conjunction with the Nebraska Science Festival.

Dr. Rao discussed the importance of both adult and pluripotent stem cells, saying they are complimentary and should not be considered competitive. Each has its place in the future of stem cell research.

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15TH ANNUAL TRIBUTE SPRING LUNCHEON



1 Chancellor Emeritus Harold Maurer, M.D., Beverly Maurer, Rebecca Oberley-Deegan, Ph.D. and David Crouse, Ph.D. **2** Diane Nelson, NCLC board member **3** Luncheon attendees **4** Barbara Weitz **5** Bob Kully, NCLC board member **6** Former U.S. Rep. John Cavanaugh, former U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson, UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey Gold, M.D., Regent Bob Whitehouse and Bob Bartee **7** Eunie Denenberg, Marilyn Konigsberg, NCLC board members