

## **Climbing Kilimanjaro to Promote – and Fund – Cancer Clinical Trials**

The head of one of the country's largest cancer clinical research consortiums will scale Mt. Kilimanjaro next February to raise awareness of the importance of clinical trials in developing better treatments for cancer patients and to help more patients enroll to studies, while at the same time raising money to help offset dwindling federal funding of such studies.

“Federal support to the National Cancer Institute is lower today, in real dollars, than it was in 2003,” says Charles Blanke, M.D., who is now training for the Kilimanjaro climb. “This funding decline threatens to stall progress in the fight against cancer at the very time breakthroughs in genetically targeted therapies are starting to radically and successfully transform the way we treat patients with cancer.”

Dr. Blanke is a Professor of Medicine at the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University and serves as chair of SWOG Cancer Research, a consortium of more than 650 medical centers and community oncology sites and more than 5,000 physician-researchers at those sites. SWOG designs and conducts clinical trials as one of five groups that together comprise the National Cancer Institute's National Clinical Trials Network, or NCTN.

NCI clinical trials have been central to advances in treating and preventing cancer over last 60 years, with a particular focus on trials the pharmaceutical industry is unlikely to conduct because the financial incentives don't align – studies of combinations of drugs or different dosing schedules, for example.

“Almost all of the life-saving and life-extending advances we've made with cancer patients over the last 50-plus years have come out of clinical trials. Many of these trials have been conducted by the NCI's clinical trials network, of which SWOG is a part,” says Blanke. Cuts in federal funding mean that this network will be able to enroll only about 14,000 patients in cancer clinical trials this year, down from a historical average as high as 25,000 patients annually.

Supporters of the Kilimanjaro Climb for Cancer Clinical Trials campaign can take part by making a donation at [swog.org/kilimanjaro](http://swog.org/kilimanjaro), where they can watch a brief video to meet Blanke and learn more about the climb and the reasons behind it. Contributions are being taken in by SWOG's non-profit arm, The Hope Foundation, and fully 98% of each donation will go directly to cancer research. Friends can also help spread the word by liking the campaign's Facebook page at [facebook.com/ClimbforCancerClinicalTrials](https://facebook.com/ClimbforCancerClinicalTrials) and sharing it with others.

“Together we can raise awareness of just how critical clinical trials are to continuing our progress against cancer,” Blanke says.

**SWOG Cancer Research** is a consortium that designs and conducts multidisciplinary clinical trials to improve the practice of medicine in preventing, detecting, and treating cancer, and to enhance the quality of life for cancer survivors. The approximately 5,000 physician-researchers and 10,000 members overall in the group's network work at more than 650 institutions nationwide, including 28 of the National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer centers, as well as cancer centers in almost a dozen other countries. Formerly the Southwest Oncology Group, SWOG is part of the NCI's National Clinical Trials Network and is supported primarily through NCI research grant funding. The group is headquartered at the Knight Cancer Institute at the Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, Oregon, (503-494-5586), has an operations office in San Antonio, Texas, and has a statistical center in Seattle, Washington. Its non-profit arm, The Hope Foundation, operates in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Learn more at [swog.org](http://swog.org) or follow [@SWOG](https://twitter.com/SWOG) on Twitter.

**National Cancer Institute's National Clinical Trials Network (NCTN)**

The NCTN is a federally funded research network whose mission is to improve treatment and quality of life for the more than 1.6 million Americans diagnosed with cancer each year. As more cancers are molecularly defined and classified into smaller subsets, NCTN supports precision medicine trials that test targeted treatments to provide individualized care to patients nationwide. [cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/nctn](http://cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/nctn)