Division of Liver Diseases

“Certainly one of the most gratifying,” notes Dr. Friedman, “is the pivotal role Mount Sinai played in the clinical trials of sorafenib (Nexavar), the first oral medication ever introduced to treat unresectable liver cancer.”

Liver cancer usually remains asymptomatic until it becomes advanced. It’s estimated that 40 percent of all liver cancer in the US is diagnosed at an advanced stage. Before the sorafenib trial, treatment options were limited.

Mount Sinai was the largest US recruitment site for clinical trials of the medication. When the drug proved effective during the trials, the FDA terminated studies and approved the drug, making sorafenib the first effective oral systemic medication for treating patients with advanced liver cancer.

The lead clinical investigator at Mount Sinai, Josep Llovet, MD, Associate Professor and Director of the Division’s Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC) Research Program, was also the lead international investigator for the sorafenib trials.

“The attention paid to the sorafenib outcomes by scientists, physicians, patients, and the media brought international attention to the Division.”

Such high visibility, remarks Dr. Friedman, is critical to his long-term goals of faculty and fellow recruitment and fundraising to enhance existing research, clinical care and education programs, as well as to start new ones.

The following select achievements of the past year highlight the many ways in which faculty and fellows in the Division of Liver Diseases are drawing national and international attention to the Division and to Mount Sinai.

• Dr. Friedman was elected to the Presidency of the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease, the largest association in the world devoted to liver disease. His term begins in 2009. He also became a Fellow of the American Gastroenterological Association.

• The Division embarked upon a strategic partnership with the world renowned hepatology unit at King’s College Hospital in London. Joint courses at each institution are planned for next year.

• Faculty and trainees within the Division gave an astonishing 33 presentations at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases.

• There has been a steady decrease in length of stay of patients being treated for liver disease at Mount Sinai. At the same time, the overall number of liver transplants has increased, as has the excellence of outcomes despite the increasingly acute condition of organ recipients.

• Meena Bansal, MD, Assistant Professor, together with colleagues from the Division of Infectious Diseases, began jointly caring for patients with complicated liver disease and HIV/HCV coinfection in the Jack Martin Fund Clinic. This multidisciplinary model is expected to generate unique clinical insights focusing on this patient population.

• Kirsten Sadler-Edepli, PhD, Assistant Professor, and colleagues identified a single gene that governs both embryonic liver development and regeneration of the liver after partial hepatectomy. The results of their study were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

• Dr. Bansal is supervising a clinical trial of a novel antifibrotic therapy for patients with HCV infection. Joseph Odin, MD, Assistant Professor, is the primary investigator for a trial of protease inhibitor therapy for patients with HCV infection.

Another patent filing describes a specific DNA sequence present within some individuals’ KLF6 gene that may predispose them to a higher risk of some cancers—especially prostate cancer. This was filed by inventors John A. Martignetti, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Genetics and Genomic Sciences, Goutham Narla, MD, PhD Instructor, and Dr. Friedman.