



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER™

News Release

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TTUHSC Amarillo Awarded \$50,000 Grant for Cutting-Edge Cancer Research

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) in Amarillo has received a \$50,000 grant from the Harrington Cancer and Health Foundation (HCHF) to support groundbreaking cancer research led by Hiranmoy Das, Ph.D., a TTUHSC Jerry H. Hodge School of Pharmacy professor of pharmaceutical sciences and director of the university's Vascular Biology and Stem Cell Research Laboratory.

The funding will help advance the study of circulating tumor cells (CTCs), rare but powerful cancer cells that play a central role in the spread of cancer from one part of the body to another. By isolating and growing these cells in the lab, Das and his team hope to better understand how cancer metastasizes and develop targeted therapies to stop it.

"CTCs are the seeds of cancer metastasis," Das said. "They're incredibly difficult to capture and study, but they hold the key to understanding why cancer returns and spreads. This research is an important step toward more effective and personalized treatments for patients in our community and beyond."

The project focuses on refining new techniques to isolate viable CTCs from patient blood samples using microfluidic and 3D culture systems. Once isolated, the cells will undergo molecular analysis to identify the drivers of cancer progression and resistance to treatment. Researchers will then use this data to design and test therapies that specifically target these high-risk cells.

By focusing on CTCs, the project addresses one of the biggest challenges in cancer care: metastasis. According to the American Cancer Society, cancer metastasis remains the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States. Current treatments often fail to stop or prevent this spread, making research into CTCs both timely and critical.

"This funding will help us build a pipeline from lab research to clinical impact," Das said. "By growing and analyzing these cells, we can screen therapies and potentially identify what works best for each patient."

Local oncologist Leonardo Forero, M.D., of Texas Oncology-Amarillo Cancer Center is partnering on the project by providing CTC samples and clinical insights. Once viable CTCs are grown in the lab, they will be tested against current cancer drugs to evaluate their effectiveness — a step toward personalizing treatment for local patients.

HCHF Executive Director Gainor Davis commended the collaboration happening in the region.

“This is about improving care in Amarillo while contributing to global cancer research,” Davis said. “If we can learn which drugs work best for each patient’s specific tumor profile, we hope that providers will be able to treat cancer more precisely and effectively. To be able to support this research happening right here in the Panhandle is something we are very proud to do.”

The findings from Das’s lab also could help secure larger grants from national research agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health and the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, and, to further expand this work.

“This grant is not only funding important science — it’s laying the foundation for the next generation of cancer treatments,” Das said.

Das’s team will conduct the research from July 1 through June 30, 2026.