

Humans of CDI

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Dr. Abner Louissaint, Jr. MD, PhD is Medical Director of the Hematology Core Laboratory at MGH Pathology and an Associate Professor of Pathology at Harvard Medical School. He is the Aziz and Nur Hamzaogullari Endowed Scholar in Hematologic Malignancies. He is also an Associate Member at the Broad Institute. He was a 2010 Physician Scientist Development Award recipient.

Dr. Louissaint graduated in 1997 from Washington University in St. Louis as a John B. Ervin Scholar and received his MD from Weill Cornell Graduate School in 2005 and a PhD in Neuroscience from Weill Graduate School. After coming to MGH for Pathology residency and Hematopathology Fellowship, Dr. Louissaint joined the MGH Pathology faculty in 2012. He is clinically active as a hematopathologist and runs a research laboratory focused on lymphoma pathogenesis and defining both prognostic markers and new targets of disease using *in-vitro* and *in-vivo* patient tumor-based models of lymphoma. In 2013, he received the Benjamin Castleman Award from the United States & Canadian Academy of Pathology for his work on pediatric-type follicular lymphoma, and in 2018 received the Berard-Dorfman Founder's Young Investigator Award from the Society of Hematopathology for his work in lymphoma.

To learn more about Dr. Abner Louissaint, Jr. MD, PhD, an Associate Professor of Pathology at Harvard Medical School, and his groundbreaking research in lymphoma, as well as the profound influence of his immigrant heritage on his journey, keep reading.

What impact has receiving the PSDA/CTDA award had on your career and science?

The PSDA has played a critical role in my career trajectory. After completing residency and fellowship, I joined MGH Pathology as an academic pathologist. The PSDA provided me the support I needed to establish my initial research program studying the molecular biology of follicular lymphoma. This initial research led to some fundamental work in which we characterized a new lymphoma type currently recognized in the WHO Classification as 'pediatric-type follicular lymphoma' that occurs mostly in children and young adults with a particularly good prognosis. This work led to NIH-sponsored mentored research support, mentored support from the Harold Amos Faculty Development Program, and support from Aziz and Nur Hamzaogullari, which in turn allowed me to expand my research program in lymphoma and establish my laboratory within the supportive environment of MGH Pathology and MGH Center for Cancer Research.

How has CDI impacted your career?

The MGH Center for Diversity and Inclusion provides so many amazing programs and resources to the MGH community. As an African-American trainee and junior faculty member, I can attest to value of the sense of belonging that the programs offered by the CDI provide, particularly during the fundamental, often challenging, years when one is training in medicine. Currently, the CDI has been a wonderful partner in my efforts to recruit new UIM medical students into the field of pathology. I am grateful to the entire team that makes the CDI possible, especially Dr. Williams, Elena Olson, and Sandra Ordonez – amazing individuals whom I've gotten to know well over the years, and who have impacted the lives and careers of so many UIM students, residents, fellows and faculty members over their careers.

What is you/your team's proudest accomplishment?

In my laboratory, our team has recently created a patient-tumor derived mouse model of a rare and aggressive type of lymphoma known as ALK-positive large B-cell lymphoma. This lymphoma type has very poor prognosis and these cancers traditionally have not been responsive to standard chemotherapies, resulting in frequent deaths. Using our new models, we demonstrated effective responses to 2nd and 3rd generation ALK inhibitors. In collaboration with my clinical colleagues, we were able to treat patients with extensive disease with this inhibitor and show remarkable responses, including the first long term remissions in this disease after therapy. We are excited to be able to dramatically impact outcomes for these patients with ALK-positive large B-cell lymphoma.

When you started at MGH, what did you hope for or envision for your time here that's come true? What's surprised you?

My vision when I started at MGH, was to learn pathology from some of the best minds in Pathology and to contribute academically to the field. After a few years of residency, I developed a passion for understanding, diagnosing and improving treatment options for blood cancers, and my vision blossomed into a desire to practice hematopathology at the highest level and establish a research program in understanding the molecular biology of lymphoma types, defining new ways of treating these diseases and defining biomarkers and features that predict how specific lymphoma subtypes will respond to particular therapies.

Tell us about your heritage. How does your heritage influence your work?

My parents immigrated at a young age from Haiti, and they leveraged great vision, optimism, ambition and energy in establishing their lives and family in the United States. I was a fortunate product of that experiment, and much of what I value in life, how I view the world, and my motivation for wanting to contribute to the improvement of health is founded on the strong foundation laid by my parents in my developing years. Growing up, my parents always encouraged me to follow my dreams – whatever they may be – and to be the best that I could be. This has guided me throughout my undergraduate and graduate training and throughout my professional career. Inheriting the optimism and ambition of my parents, I knew early on that I wanted to pursue a career in medicine in order to both contribute in the immediate care of individual patients, and to make long term impact in how patients with particular diseases are treated. Today, I continue to be motivated by that same goal, and am gratified that I get to fulfill this goal by doing I what I love to do each day at MGH.

Tell us a bit about your family.

Outside of work I enjoy spending time with my wife and daughter. My wife and I met in medical school, and she is a primary care pediatrician and founding partner of Commonwealth Pediatrics. I have a fun-loving 14-year-old daughter, who is passionate about volleyball, acting and crochet and keeps me young!