



## News Brief

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
**UNM Cancer Center Research in the News**

### **UNM Cancer Center Director Part of Research Team that Links Native American Ancestry to Greater Relapse Risk in Young Leukemia Patients**

**Albuquerque, NM—February 16, 2011**—New research by Dr. Cheryl Willman, Director and CEO of the UNM Cancer Center, and her colleagues at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and the Children’s Oncology Group, links Native American ancestry to a greater risk of relapse in young leukemia patients. This finding is significant for both Native Americans and Hispanics, who have a high percentage of Native ancestry. The new research shows that Native American ancestry increases the odds that cancer will return among children and adolescents battling acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). Importantly, it also suggests that this added relapse risk could be eliminated by administering an extra phase of chemotherapy.

The research study, published in the scientific journal *Nature Genetics*, breaks new ground by using genomics—the study of the human genome—to define ancestry, rather than relying on self-declared racial or ethnic categories. The study represents the first time genomics has been used to demonstrate an inherited genetic basis for racial and

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ethnic disparities in cancer survival. Dr. Willman and colleagues' findings represent another advance toward personalized cancer care, in which cancer treatment could be tailored to patient subgroups and, eventually, individual patients.

### **About Dr. Cheryl Willman**

Dr. Cheryl Willman, MD, is the CEO and Director of the UNM Cancer Center. An expert in leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma, Dr. Willman holds the Maurice & Marguerite Liberman Chair in Cancer Research and is a Professor in the Departments of Pathology and Medicine.

### **About the UNM Cancer Center**

The UNM Cancer Center is the Official Cancer Center of the State of New Mexico and the only National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer center in the state. As one of just 66 NCI-designated cancer centers nationwide, the UNM Cancer Center is recognized for its scientific excellence, contributions to cancer research and delivery of medical advances to patients and their families. It is home to 85 board-certified oncology physicians representing every cancer specialty and more than 125 research scientists hailing from such prestigious institutions as M.D. Anderson, Johns Hopkins and the Mayo Clinic. Learn more at [cancer.unm.edu](http://cancer.unm.edu).

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