Professor and Cancer Center CEO Cheryl Willman to Receive the 2015 STC.UNM Innovation Fellow Award

Albuquerque, NM – April 2, 2015. Professor and Cancer Center CEO Cheryl L. Willman has been chosen to receive a 2015 STC.UNM Innovation Fellow Award in recognition of her achievements as one of the University of New Mexico’s leading innovators. This special award is presented each year by the STC.UNM (STC) Board of Directors to a university faculty inventor whose body of technologies has made a significant social and economic impact on society and the marketplace. The award will be presented to Dr. Willman at STC’s 2015 Innovation Awards Dinner on April 20, 2015. The annual event also recognizes UNM faculty, staff and students who have received issued patents and registered copyrights/trademarks within the past year. In addition to receiving the Innovation Fellow Award, Dr. Willman will also receive an Innovation Award for an issued patent this year.

On behalf of the entire STC.UNM Board of Directors, STC CEO Lisa Kuuttila stated:

“Dr. Willman is a remarkable cancer physician and inventor who is doing cutting-edge research to find new ways to treat cancer. She is an international expert in leukemia research, particularly acute lymphoblastic leukemia in children, and an innovator in discovering the underlying gene mutations in these cancer cells. Dr. Willman’s use of next generation genomic sequencing to find targeting therapies coupled with her collaboration with Dr. Jeffrey Brinker in developing the protocell, a nanoparticle designed to deliver cancer drugs to targeted cancer cells, will vastly improve cancer treatment for patients everywhere. Her individual achievements are not the only thing remarkable about her. Dr. Willman is also head of the UNM Cancer Center where her outstanding faculty are doing innovative research. The STC Board of Directors is honored to recognize her as a 2015 Innovation Fellow.”

UNM Health Sciences Chancellor and School of Medicine Dean Paul Roth added:

“Cheryl Willman is a visionary leader, care provider and innovator who, throughout her illustrious career, has made immeasurable contributions to the health and well-being of all New Mexicans. Dr. Willman was appointed director and CEO of the University of New Mexico Cancer Center in November 1999. Under her stewardship, the Cancer Center was first awarded a five-year National Cancer Institute P20 Cancer Center Planning Grant in 2000. Five years later, the Center succeeded on its first attempt at NCI Designation and was awarded a NCI P30 CCSG grant. The Center underwent a highly successful competitive renewal in 2010 and is undergoing another renewal this year. Additionally, the Cancer Center has been ranked as one of “America’s Best Cancer Hospitals” by U.S. News & World Report.

As a clinical enterprise, the Cancer Center has been a stunning success: it serves 60 percent of the adult and virtually all of the pediatric oncology patients in New Mexico. Dr. Willman and her leadership team have recruited widely to build the Cancer Center’s interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research programs. Today, these include 125 faculty who are program members from UNM and our consortium institutions, supported by nearly $70 million in annual cancer research funding. The Health Sciences Center is delighted that she is receiving this award.”

Dr. Willman is also a professor of pathology and internal medicine in the Department of Pathology where she holds the Maurice and Marguerite Liberman Distinguished Chair in Cancer Research. Dr. Willman completed high school in Bettendorf, Iowa; received her B.A. in chemistry from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota; and her M.D. in 1981 from The Mayo School of Medicine in Rochester, Minnesota. Awarded one of the first NIH Physician Scientist Awards in 1984, Dr. Willman completed her
residency and postdoctoral training in diagnostic pathology (with a specialty in blood cancers) and cancer research at the National Institutes of Health in Washington, DC, UNM, and the University of Washington in Seattle.