

UAMS News Bureau

Office of Communications & Marketing
4301 West Markham # 890
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

uamshealth.com/news



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Media Contacts:

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

Katrina Dupins, 501-686-8149
Wireless phone: 501-920-6977
katrina@uams.edu

**Michael Birrer, M.D., Ph.D., Named
UAMS Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute Director**

LITTLE ROCK — Internationally recognized medical oncologist Michael Birrer, M.D., Ph.D., has been named vice chancellor and director of the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS). Birrer specializes in gynecologic cancers and will join the university by the end of the year.

He formerly served as director of the O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Birrer succeeds Laura Hutchins, M.D., who served as interim director of the UAMS Cancer Institute since June 2018.

“It is an honor to welcome Dr. Birrer as the new director of the UAMS Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute. As a highly regarded physician-scientist, Dr. Birrer is uniquely qualified to increase the Cancer Institute’s capacity for innovative research and advanced clinical care in the years ahead,” said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA.

As director of the UAMS Cancer Institute, Birrer will lead all cancer-related activities for UAMS, whose cancer clinics reported more than 150,000 patient visits during the last fiscal year. There are about 150 UAMS faculty members engaged in cancer-related research and clinical activities.

“I left a professorship at Harvard Medical School in an attempt to help a broader number of patients suffering from cancer. This position at UAMS will allow me to do that for cancer patients throughout Arkansas,” said Birrer, who also will hold the position of Cancer Service Line director.

“Dr. Birrer possesses the strong leadership experience needed to move the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute toward the goal of achieving designation by the National Cancer Institute,” said Christopher Westfall, M.D., executive vice chancellor and dean of the UAMS College of Medicine. “He will no doubt be an outstanding addition to the Cancer Institute and to UAMS as a whole.”

NCI Designation is awarded through a highly competitive assessment process during which cancer centers must demonstrate outstanding depth and breadth of high-quality cancer research. Receiving designation brings substantial benefits, including the ability to access federal research funding and offer clinical trials not available to non-designated centers. It also is expected to result in a \$72 million economic impact on Arkansas and create about 1,500 new jobs over five years.

In support of the Cancer Institute's efforts to achieve NCI Designation, the Arkansas House and Senate unanimously passed in March 2019 Senate Bill 151, which established an account into which funds supporting NCI Designation could be deposited.

Then, with the support of Gov. Asa Hutchinson, an annual amount of at least \$10 million was designated for efforts related to the institute's quest for designation. The funds will be used to recruit top grant-funded scientists to bring their research dollars to UAMS to meet the requirements set by the NCI.

"Given the state support, UAMS and philanthropic support, we estimate a \$70 million investment over the next five years in the Cancer Institute, which will strengthen our chance at NCI designation," said Birrer.

"We look forward to working hand in hand with Dr. Birrer to ensure the Cancer Institute is actively serving the cancer care needs of all Arkansans, while also pursuing dynamic and forward-thinking research," said Steppe Mette, M.D., interim vice chancellor for clinical programs and chief executive officer of the UAMS Medical Center. Mette served as chair of the director search committee.

"As I step down as Cancer Institute interim director, I am confident Dr. Birrer has the skills and desire to advance our mission and move the institute forward in many vital areas," Hutchins said.

Birrer completed his medical degree and doctorate of philosophy in 1982 in the Medical Scientist Training Program at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. Following a medical internship and residency at Massachusetts General Hospital, Birrer entered the Medical Oncology Fellowship program at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. After his fellowship, Birrer was appointed senior investigator (with tenure) and established the molecular mechanism section in the Division of Cancer Prevention and Control.





In 2008, Birrer was appointed professor of medicine at the Harvard School of Medicine and assumed the position of director for both Gynecologic Medical Oncology at Massachusetts General Hospital and the Gynecologic Oncology Research Program at the Dana Farber/Harvard Cancer Center.

In 2017, he accepted the position of director of the O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he served as professor of medicine, pathology and OB-GYN.

Recognized nationally and internationally as an expert in gynecologic oncology, Birrer's primary research interest is in characterizing the genomics of gynecologic cancers to improve the clinical management of these diseases. His clinical interests include ovarian cancer, endometrial cancer and cervical cancer.

Birrer has approximately 400 publications, including peer-reviewed manuscripts, book chapters and review articles. He served as chair and chair emeritus of the Department of Defense Ovarian Cancer Research Program, chair of the Committee for Experimental Medicine of the Gynecologic Oncology Group, chair of the Translational Science Working Group of the Gynecologic Cancer Intergroup, and a member of the Gynecologic Cancer Steering Committee.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. It is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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