

# Taking Cancer to Trial



President, CEO, and cofounder Scott Cormack is helping pave the way in the fight against cancer.

Based in Vancouver—with an additional location in Bothell, Washington—OncoGenex is a biopharmaceutical company committed to the development and commercialization of new cancer therapies that address treatment resistance in patients with cancer. Scott Cormack, president, CEO, and cofounder, and Martin Gleave, cofounder and principal inventor, work with a staff of 35 professionals to conduct drug trials, evaluate data, gauge patients' unmet treatment needs, assess new products in development, and manage the manufacturing activities of the company's cutting-edge treatments to weaken tumour resistance.

“Our primary focus is treatment resistance in cancer,” Cormack says. “One of the challenges in cancer treatment is the fact that tumours will try to adapt to evade the effects of treatment. Tumours circumvent therapy by turning on and off genetic switches. What we do as a company is target those switches with therapeutics, with the goal of disabling a tumour's ability to adapt, in order to make other therapies continue to work effectively.”

## 5 Questions with Scott Cormack

### 1. What does innovation mean to OncoGenex?

Innovation is at the core of our existence. Innovation has given us the product candidates that we're pursuing as potential new treatments for cancer.

OncoGenex's lead product candidate, OGX-011, also known as custirsen sodium, was designed to inhibit the production of a specific protein associated with treatment resistance in many cancers, and has completed five Phase II clinical trials for prostate, lung, and breast cancers. Presently being developed as an adjunct therapy to enhance the effectiveness of chemotherapy, OGX-011 has shown promising preclinical, phase-one, and phase-two results when added to commonly used chemotherapies in several tumour types.

"OGX-011 is designed to inhibit the production of clusterin, a protein that is associated with treatment resistance in a number of solid tumours, including prostate, breast, nonsmall cell lung, ovarian, and others," Cormack says. "Clusterin is overproduced by tumour cells, which conveys broad resistance to many standard anticancer therapies, including chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and other treatment modalities. By decreasing clusterin, we believe we can reduce a tumour's ability to adapt."

This is a huge leap for the industry, which has developed therapies but can't accommodate for an adapting tumour.

"Generally, the industry has made inroads on certain kinds of cancer, but for many—including lung, prostate, and breast cancer—patients still die from their diseases because they run out of treatment options," Cormack says. "That's what our product candidates are about: finding a way to delay or prevent tumours from adapting."

Cormack oversees the strategic direction of the company. With a team of dedicated professionals with deep experience in drug development, marketing, and manufacturing, Cormack decides on which product candidates to advance, which indications to pursue, how to finance development activities, and how to prioritize these activities. With a bachelor's degree in science from the University of Alberta and 25 years in the industry, Cormack has demonstrated the patience needed to persevere through the many aspects of drug development that take years to complete.

"It's not an instant-gratification industry—you can't look to tomorrow for success," Cormack says. "Developing novel therapies for cancer takes a long time. But when you

**2. Is there a technology, trend, or idea that drives OncoGenex forward?**

Focusing on how tumours adapt in order to circumvent the benefits of standard anticancer therapies is paramount for OncoGenex. The many advances in molecular biology and cancer biology have driven our path.

**3. Where do you hope this innovation will lead OncoGenex in the next five years?**

Ideally, to make available novel treatments for cancer patients that improve their survival and quality of life.

**4. How do you cultivate innovation among your workforce?**

I constantly press for new solutions, to address issues and allow staff to work through the solution.

**5. How can a company encourage innovation without breaking the bank?**

How can a company survive without innovation? The bank will break regardless if a company does not maintain its competitive advantage.

see data for the first time, everything you've been working for comes into sharp focus. Working to develop new therapies for cancer—and potentially make a difference in the lives of so many people—is a comforting thing. There's a lot of passion behind what we hope to do for humankind.”