

Mount Sinai inside



Richard R. P. Warner, MD

Understanding Carcinoid Cancer

Doctor dedicates life's work to carcinoid research and treatment

In 1954, as a gastroenterology fellow at Mount Sinai, Richard R. P. Warner, MD, read an intriguing article about symptoms associated with a new disorder people knew little about, carcinoid syndrome. The disease is caused by a rare cancerous tumor usually found in the gastrointestinal tract and occasionally in the lung, secreting chemicals into the bloodstream.

More than half a century later, Dr. Warner is continuing the Hospital's long tradition of being a leader in gastrointestinal disorders by advancing the medical community's understanding of carcinoid cancer.

Dr. Warner is Professor of Medicine (Gastroenterology) and serves as Medical Director of the Carcinoid Cancer Foundation, which is based in White Plains, New York, and is aided by other Mount Sinai faculty.

The nonprofit Carcinoid Cancer Foundation (www.carcinoid.org) encourages and supports research and education on carcinoid and related neuroendocrine cancers. At Mount Sinai, where Dr. Warner recently became a full-time faculty member, he now helps train other doctors at the new Center for Carcinoid and Neuroendocrine Tumors.

"Carcinoid cancer is a little-known condition that only a small number of patients experience," says Dr. Warner, who sees about 150 new cases every year. "Most doctors know very little about diagnosis and treatment of carcinoid tumors, but we have made significant inroads."

These inroads include pioneering a new treatment that involves injecting microscopic radiation-bearing particles into the blood supply of the tumors.

"In the coming year," says Dr. Warner, "we will continue working with this treatment, with surgery, and we will also participate in clinical trials testing several very promising new drugs, as well as perfecting laboratory tests for diagnosis and monitoring. These are ongoing efforts that have prolonged and saved patients' lives."

Although rare, carcinoid tumors make up more than 40 percent of all small intestinal malignant tumors. They can occur anywhere in the gastrointestinal tract and pancreas and less commonly in the lungs and elsewhere. About 12,000 cases are diagnosed each year in the United States, and it has been estimated that there are 102,000 people in the country with this slowly progressing malignancy.

When these tumors metastasize, it can lead to carcinoid syndrome. Between 10

and 40 percent of such carcinoids secrete excessive levels of a range of hormones, most notably serotonin, causing flushing, diarrhea, wheezing, and heart failure. Dr. Warner first read about the syndrome more than 50 years ago.

Through web sites, newsletters, conferences, and talks, Dr. Warner has contributed to the growing research, education, and support of understanding carcinoid cancer. Dr. Warner also helped form the North American Neuroendocrine Tumor Society, a society for doctors interested in this condition, and formed many support groups across the country.

"Carcinoid cancer and carcinoid syndrome are orphan diseases that do not garner as much attention as more common diseases," Dr. Warner says. "But we are working to change that."