Yale chemist wins $3.6 million from military for breast cancer research

Yale UniversityYale University

Yale chemist Dr. David A. Spiegel has been awarded $3.6 million from the U.S. Department of Defense for new work expected to push the boundaries of breast cancer research.

Spiegel, associate professor of chemistry and pharmacology, intends to develop a technology platform that will enable the creation of molecules that can distinguish between healthy and diseased cells, with a focus on breast cancer cells. The project potentially represents a new way of approaching diagnosis and treatment.

“If this works for breast cancer, it could work for all kinds of diseases,” said Spiegel, who studies the molecular mechanisms of human disease. He and his research team develop novel chemical methods for the synthesis of complex molecular targets for therapeutic aims.

Spiegel was named one of three 2012 recipients of the Era of Hope Scholar Award, sponsored by the Department of Defense. The award, which provides $2.5 million over five years, supports researchers early in their careers who are “the best and the brightest” in their fields and “have a high potential for innovation in cancer research,” according to the Defense Department.

The military specifically seeks out researchers with “a vision that challenges current dogma and demonstrate an ability to look beyond tradition and convention.”

Said Spiegel, “That’s exciting to me — being able to change the paradigm of how drugs are discovered and how we conceive of the discovery of new therapeutic approaches.”

Scott Miller, chair of Yale's chemistry department, said, "The department is delighted about this fantastic news, as it allows a superb colleague to pursue a supremely important objective with cutting-edge molecular approaches."

The award includes $2.5 million for Spiegel's direct costs and $1.1 million for Yale, Spiegel said.

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