SCI-TECH

"Last Friday night, yeah, we danced on tabletops."
LAST FRIDAY NIGHT (T.G.I.F.) KATY PERRY

Business, medicine cross paths at cancer innovation summit

BY CHUER CINDY ZHONG AND GHIZAL HALIM
STAFF REPORTER AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



MARTÍN PERALTA / HEAD PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

During a sold-out summit that spanned Monday and Tuesday, statewide nonprofit BioCT and the Yale Cancer Center connected hundreds of attendees with over 70 speakers, who presented on recent developments in cancer treatment and biotechnology.

New Haven's first Future of Oncology Summit, which was organized by the Yale Cancer Center and BioCT, a statewide biotechnology nonprofit, took place at 101 College St. this week.

Sponsored by over 40 organizations, the conference gathered hundreds of professionals across medicine, academia and commercial industry on Monday and Tuesday to learn about advancements in cancer treatment. The event, which was packed with fireside chats and panels, featured more than 70 speakers and was completely sold out, according to its website.

"I used to think Connecticut's the best-kept secret, and looking at today's agenda, we're not going to be a secret anymore," BioCT CEO Jodie Gillon said in her opening speech.

The first day of the summit centered around artificial intelligence and data science in cancer treatments, while the second day focused on investment in therapeutics and strategic collaboration.

The summit was chaired by David Scheer GRD '84, the president of Scheer & Company and co-chair of BioCT, and Yale Cancer Center Director Eric Winer '78 MED '83. Its keynote speakers were Annie Lamont, a managing partner of Oak HC/FT and the wife of Gov. Ned Lamont SOM '80, and Clifford Hudis, the CEO of the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

"I think what we want to be able to understand, and I think we will from some of the people who will be speaking, is that we are making a difference," Scheer said in his remarks. "We do have the resources now to change the lives of patients."

Gov. Lamont, who was reelected to a third term in office last Tuesday, followed with a speech about continuing state investment into healthcare equity and expanding the biotechnology industry.

The summit came after QuantumCT opened a new innovation center at 101 College St. in early October, a space partly funded by Connecticut's $50.5 million investment into New Haven biotechnology infrastructure announced last year.

Anthony Tavares, a business development director of an Ontario-based biotech firm, told the News that he thinks Gov. Lamont has driven budget allocations towards the biotech industry in a good direction.

"I think he has the right ideas behind where government spending and government support can come in to strengthen the life sciences ecosystem," Tavares said about the governor.

Tavares said he had been following BioCT for some time and first heard about the summit through LinkedIn.

Summit attendee Michael Bakutes, a managing director at the advisory firm CFGI, said he has noticed Connecticut's growing investment in biotech entrepreneurship. He said that when he started working at the firm, all of his clients were in Cambridge.

"Now even just over the last six years, just seeing the growth and all of the companies coming out of Yale has been really cool to watch," Bakutes said.

Ignaty Leshchiner, the chief of the computational oncology and biostatistics division at the Yale Cancer Center, told the News that he thinks something similar to the biotechnology industry build-out in Cambridge's Kendall Square is happening today in New Haven, "which is exciting."

Diego Miranda '97, who is shadowing Yale oncologist Adriana Kahn, said in an interview that it was "very cool to see the predictions for the future and how AI and precision medicine is trying to evolve the future of oncology everyday."

While physicians and entrepreneurs alike championed biotech developments, they said that innovation can lack impact without changes to healthcare equity.

According to Gillion, advancements in care "remain moot" if patients are unable to access them.

"I think a heartbreaking part of the system is when we know the best care and we have advanced diagnostics that can really help us deliver excellent treatments," Margaret Callahan, the chief of the hematology and oncology division at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, said during a panel.

"If you're in a situation where there's a delay in getting your molecular testing, because you waited on a prior authorization or you were worried about a copay, you're not getting the best care that exists today," Callahan continued.

The building at 101 College St. is home to companies including Yale Ventures, Alexion Pharmaceuticals and BioCT.

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Yale-led local health project earns office space, looks to expand scope

BY YOO-MIN KOH
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The Neighborhood Health Project, a Yale student-led initiative founded in 2003, has established its first dedicated office in the basement of the Episcopal church at 57 Olive St.

Operating at the church on Saturday mornings, the NHP brings together students from the Yale School of Medicine, the Yale School of Public Health and the Yale School of Nursing to provide free health screenings and resources under the supervision of medical professionals. The new space consolidates supplies previously stored across multiple locations, strengthening the project's longstanding partnership with the local community.

"We never had an office before," Jeffrey Bender, a professor of cardiology and a medical advisor for the NHP, said. "This is a new space opportunity."

Ryan Sutherland MED '27, a fifth-year medical student at the School of Medicine and a co-director of communications for the NHP, said in a phone interview that storage space is crucial for the program. The space has already been filled with essential supplies, supporting both regular operations and broader outreach initiatives, he said.

"I think with the office space now, we've been able to sort of coordinate with the church, which will help us expand a little bit more and help us with storage. I mean, we have so much there," Sutherland said. "It's filled to the brim with diapers and menstrual products and everything you could think about that's kind of a basic need item."

Sutherland said the new office space allows NHP to expand its collaborations with other organizations, including Gather, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services and Fair Haven Community Health Care.

Unlike traditional services, NHP does not require residents to go out of their way to seek out medical guidance. Instead, it partners with Loaves and Fishes food pantry to reach vulnerable populations visiting the pantry for food assistance.

Beyond identifying blood pressure and blood glucose levels, volunteers connect residents with local healthcare providers for follow-up care. NHP also distributes diapers, socks, shoes, menstrual products and hygiene supplies.

Anton Bankov MED '29, a second-year medical student at the School of Medicine and a co-director of community outreach of the NHP, said in a phone interview that the project's impact extends beyond health screenings.

Conversations with patients can reveal challenges ranging from housing insecurity to mental health concerns, allowing volunteers to connect residents with additional resources, he said.

"Some of my longest conversations with patients have been with folks whose blood pressure and blood sugar are completely normal," Bankov said.

Bender said the NHP was originally established as an educational opportunity for Yale health professional students to develop screening skills and engage with the New Haven community. However, the role quickly expanded as volunteers recognized the need for accessible preventative healthcare services among the medically underserved, he said.

Construction of the Episcopal Church of St. Paul and St. James finished in 1830.



ETHAN SULLIVAN / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The new office and storage space has already been filled with medical supplies and is set to allow the program, which provides free blood pressure screenings and glucose tests for New Haven residents, to collaborate with more local organizations.

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