

The DEPARTMENT of INTERNAL MEDICINE
Division of Endocrinology & Metabolism



October 15, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing a letter in support of the application of Yanfen Hu for a position in your program. I work in the area of aromatase gene regulation and expression and have gotten to know Dr. Hu at the University of Virginia. My laboratory and that of Drs. Hu and Rong Li have conducted collaborative studies over the past two years. In this setting, I have discussed her work, heard her present, and gained insight into her talents and potential.

Dr. Hu graduated from Fu Dan University, one of the top universities in China. As soon as she graduated, she was selected as a graduate student via extensive nationwide screening by a joint Chinese-American Biological Science Program. It should be noted that only 10 from the entire country of China are chosen for this program. She received her Ph.D. in Molecular Biology at the University of California at Berkeley. She then joined the Genentech Corporation as a postdoctoral fellow studying apoptosis. She then had a second postdoctoral experience in signal transduction at Cold Spring Harbor. After that time she joined Dr. Rong Li's laboratory at the University of Virginia. Initially she was hired as a Research Associate but then was quite successful as an Assistant Professor of Research and then Associate Professor of Research. While Associate Professor of Research is not a tenured position, promotion to this level at the University of Virginia is quite rigorous and requires excellence in Scholarship and Research but does not require excellence in teaching. Dr. Hu has recently focused her attention on the interaction between the BrCa1 gene and aromatase regulation. The hypothesis is highly innovative and suggests that aromatase and BRCA1 interact in such a way that BrCa1 suppresses aromatase expression. With mutations in BrCa1, aromatase is overexpressed. This could be the link whereby bilateral oophorectomy reduces the risk of breast cancer by 50% in BrCa1 carriers even though BrCa1 tumors are usually ER negative at presentation. This hypothesis suggests that production of estrogen via aromatase could induce breast tumors in an ER independent manner, an hypothesis that is currently being investigated in our laboratory. Thus, her work has been of major interest to investigators generally and specifically to those in our laboratory.

Yanfen is a highly intelligent individual with a strong work ethic. While she has a rather quiet personality, her level of conviction about her work, her perseverance in her studies, and her publication record attest to her outstanding abilities. She has now had 11 publications in high impact, peer reviewed journals. Four of these are first authored and a fifth, her most innovative in my opinion, is in press in *Oncogene*. Other manuscripts have been published in *Gene*, *Genes and Development*, *Cell*, *JBC*, *EMBO reports*, *J Cell Biol* and *Endocrinology*.

Dr. Hu has competed successfully for funding by the Department of Defense Breast Cancer Program from 5/03 to 4/06. She submitted an RO-1 application which scored in the 15.6th percentile and is pending. This is an impressive score for a first time applicant for an

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RO-1. Until the past two years, this would have been well below the payline. She has also written another Department of Defense Breast Program grant on BrCa2 and Bard.

How would I assess her potential as an investigator in the breast cancer field? I predict that she will be quite successful in the studies that she is currently pursuing. She has excellent background and training from Berkeley, Cold Spring Harbor, and from her association with Dr. Rong Li. She has the attitude that she can develop the expertise to solve any problem that arises while pursuing her studies. Her mature attitude allows her to move forward with optimism in a highly competitive field. She critically evaluates her own findings and neither over- nor under-interprets her data. The topic of her studies is highly innovative and she approaches an important clinical problem. Based upon all of these characteristics, I believe that she has a high likelihood of competing for ongoing funding and for making substantial contributions as an investigator.

I write this letter as an individual with a broad clinical and basic investigative perspective about the aromatase field as well as 30 years of experience conducting studies with uninterrupted NIH funding. I have observed many young faculty members in my various positions as Division Chief, Department Chair, and Cancer Center Director. From this vantage point, I can give her a very high level of recommendation. If I can provide any further information, please let me know.

Sincerely yours,

Richard J. Santen, MD
Professor of Medicine