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Media Contact: [Kara Gavin \(mailto: kegavin@med.umich.edu\)](mailto:kegavin@med.umich.edu) 734-764-2220

From vacant to vibrant: 2,000th person moves to U-M's new research campus as more scientists are recruited

Team from Harvard helps North Campus Research Complex hit key milestone

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Less than three years after the first person moved in, the University of Michigan has transformed a vacant former pharmaceutical company campus into a vibrant hub for research – an achievement marked this week with the move of the 2,000th person to the site.



Zhong Wang, Ph.D.
NCRC's 2000th person

Today, a former Harvard University researcher and his team are unpacking their laboratory equipment and setting up experiments in their new home at U-M's [North Campus Research Complex or NCRC \(http://ncrc.umich.edu\)](http://ncrc.umich.edu).

They're the latest in a series of top-level recruitments U-M has been able to make since its 2009 purchase of the site, which includes 2 million square feet of space across 28 buildings and 173 acres of land.

[Fact sheet: NCRC by the numbers \(http://umhsheadlines.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/NCRC-at-2000-occupants.pdf\)](http://umhsheadlines.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/NCRC-at-2000-occupants.pdf)

"How fortuitous and fortunate that the 2000th person to move to the NCRC is a faculty recruit from another great institution," says NCRC executive director David Canter. "Mixing together biologists and engineers, university research and commercial companies, and established faculty and new blood is the very essence of the NCRC's mission."

The newly recruited team is led by Zhong Wang, Ph.D., a stem cell and epigenetics researcher specializing in heart cells. He's joining the U-M Medical School's [Department of Cardiac Surgery \(http://med.umich.edu/cardiac-surgery/\)](http://med.umich.edu/cardiac-surgery/), and will work with the many other U-M [Cardiovascular Research Center \(http://www.uofmhealth.org/news/archive/201210/university-michigan-strengthens-pulse-heart-research\)](http://www.uofmhealth.org/news/archive/201210/university-michigan-strengthens-pulse-heart-research) members based at NCRC.

In addition to heart disease, researchers at NCRC focus on cancer, health policy, emergency medicine, bioinformatics and the intersection of engineering and medicine. The NCRC population also includes hundreds of staff whose work supports U-M research, and employees of small companies that have spun out of U-M research.

U-M has invested in the creation of 10 [shared scientific facilities \(http://ncrc.umich.edu/research/scientific-core-facilities\)](http://ncrc.umich.edu/research/scientific-core-facilities) at NCRC, such as DNA sequencing and advanced microscopes.



A [cafeteria](http://ncrc.umich.edu/facility-services/working-at-ncrc/ncrc-amenities/opus-one) (<http://ncrc.umich.edu/facility-services/working-at-ncrc/ncrc-amenities/opus-one>), [art exhibits](http://ncrc.umich.edu/facility-services/working-at-ncrc/ncrc-amenities/art-program) (<http://ncrc.umich.edu/facility-services/working-at-ncrc/ncrc-amenities/art-program>), conference facilities, updated information technology, exercise facilities, a [child care center](http://hr.umich.edu/childcare/northcampus/) (<http://hr.umich.edu/childcare/northcampus/>) and even blood drives make the campus – once seen as a remote outpost by those on U-M's main campus – a true community.

Also this month, dozens of researchers from the [VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System's Center for Clinical Management Research](http://www.annarbor.hsrp.research.va.gov/) (<http://www.annarbor.hsrp.research.va.gov/>) moved to NCRC, to work more closely with colleagues in the [Institute for Healthcare Policy & Innovation](http://ihpi.umich.edu) (<http://ihpi.umich.edu>). The institute's first director, John Ayanian, M.D., MPP, was recruited from Harvard last fall. IHPI includes 411 researchers from U-M and partner entities in the region, many of them based at NCRC.

Scientific recruitments to NCRC

“At a time when many academic centers are scaling back their efforts to bring talented new research faculty and teams on board, we have made a commitment to continue to push for better understanding of health and disease by bolstering our biomedical research programs, and strengthening the support we give researchers,” says James O. Woolliscroft, M.D., dean of the [U-M Medical School](http://www.med.umich.edu/medschool) (<http://www.med.umich.edu/medschool>). He cites other recent recruits based at NCRC – such as researchers who study cellular changes that occur during medical emergencies, and translational oncologists seeking new cancer options.

For instance, the new chair of the U-M [Department of Emergency Medicine](http://medicine.umich.edu/dept/emergency-medicine) (<http://medicine.umich.edu/dept/emergency-medicine>), Robert Neumar, M.D., Ph.D., moved his lab from the University of Pennsylvania to NCRC, as did his recruit Kevin Ward, M.D., who arrived from Virginia Commonwealth University. Hasan Alam, M.D., recruited from Harvard to be head of the [General Surgery section of the U-M Department of Surgery](http://surgery.med.umich.edu/general/patient/) (<http://surgery.med.umich.edu/general/patient/>), has his lab at NCRC, as does Hector Valdivia, M.D., Ph.D., a heart rhythm researcher who moved from the University of Wisconsin to become co-director of U-M's [Center for Arrhythmia Research](http://www.med.umich.edu/arrhythmia_research/) (http://www.med.umich.edu/arrhythmia_research/).

“Our ability to establish a collaborative research environment at NCRC that crosses traditional disciplinary and school boundaries, at a lower cost and more rapid pace than building new facilities, has made it possible to offer new recruits space that is ready for their arrival,” Woolliscroft adds.

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D., CEO of the U-M Health System, whose own office recently moved to NCRC, notes that the acquisition and carefully planned use of NCRC is helping UMHS fulfill strategic goals. “Through this expansion, we’ve been able to make important strides in expanding and aligning our research strengths, and our support for research, while also creating new jobs and fostering the growth of emerging companies, all while making the best use of resources,” she says.

“NCRC has allowed us to build on what we do best as a university—to bring together researchers from multiple disciplines to address the full complexity of the challenges our society faces,” says Stephen Forrest, U-M vice president for research. “In doing so, we are spurring innovation that can lead to significant progress in a variety of fields.”

A “golden opportunity”

The strategic placement of research labs, to maximize collaboration and use of specific types of space, has been a hallmark of NCRC’s development. Wang, the 2000th person to move to NCRC, calls his move a “golden opportunity” to work literally alongside other researchers in cardiac disease, stem cells and epigenetics.

“We’ve made a conscious decision to have the lab design feature open doorways between different lab areas, so we can collaborate easily,” he says. “The availability of NCRC space, and the cooperative atmosphere, contributed a lot to my decision to come to Michigan.”

He also notes that proximity to researchers who are also U-M heart physicians means he will have access to heart muscle tissue samples from patients, which he can use to create stem cell lines and study disease at the most basic level. NCRC’s DNA sequencing and advanced microscope facilities, and shared cardiovascular research equipment, will also help him pursue his research aims fully, he says. He is bringing two research fellows with him, and hopes to hire more.

A diverse community

Although Medical School faculty and staff make up a majority of NCRC’s 2,000 people, the community also includes members of many other U-M units and dozens of private partners.

That includes the College of Engineering, School of Dentistry, College of Pharmacy and other colleges – as well as members of the Vice President for Research team including the Business Engagement Center and Office of Technology Transfer. The private companies on the site include many in the Venture Accelerator, which offers assistance and transitional space to U-M startups, as well as more established small firms Boropharm and Lycera.

In the last three years, more than 300 jobs have been added that can be directly attributed to NCRC, and more than 47,000 people have attended events there. Since buying NCRC from Pfizer for \$108 million in June 2009, and moving the first office staff in March 2010, U-M has spent nearly \$70 million to renovate and operate the site.

In all, nearly 600,000 of the site's 975,000 net assignable square feet of labs and offices are in use or have been committed to use. Planning for how to use the remaining lab and office space, including potential capital projects, will continue along the same strategic path that has marked space use to date.

To learn more about NCRC, visit <http://ncrc.umich.edu> (<http://ncrc.umich.edu>).

News

[U-M launches new Precision Health research initiative \(/news/archive/201710/u-m-launches-new-precision-health-research-initiative\)](/news/archive/201710/u-m-launches-new-precision-health-research-initiative)

[Older Americans don't get – or seek – enough help from doctors and pharmacists on drug costs, poll finds \(/news/archive/201706/older-americans-don%E2%80%99t-get-%E2%80%93-or-seek-%E2%80%93-enough-help-doctors\)](/news/archive/201706/older-americans-don%E2%80%99t-get-%E2%80%93-or-seek-%E2%80%93-enough-help-doctors)

[As America ages, new national poll will track key health issues for those over 50 \(/news/archive/201706/america-ages-new-national-poll-will-track-key-health-issues\)](/news/archive/201706/america-ages-new-national-poll-will-track-key-health-issues)

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Media Inquiries: 734-764-2220 8 a.m.-5 p.m. ET

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