



## BOARD SPOTLIGHT

# Robert Decker, MD

Becoming a doctor wasn't always the plan for Robert Decker; math was his real forte. At a young age, he remembers impressing his uncle, a math professor, with his ability to perform mental calculations -- a muscle he sometimes flexes in the form of parlor tricks.

In college, Decker turned his attention from mathematics to molecular biology, then in its infancy. "It was fascinating. We were just beginning to look at its applications in oncology," Decker recalls. "People funding the research weren't really interested in how yeast multiplied or how amoebas reproduced, but if you mentioned that your work could help bring us closer to understanding cancer cells, their ears would perk up."

Decker later graduated with high honors from the UC Davis School of Medicine, where he specialized in hematology oncology. Thereafter, Decker returned to Los Angeles for his internship and residency. He served as chief resident at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and completed a fellowship at the UCLA Medical Center.

In the late 1980s, Decker co-founded the Bone Marrow and Stem Cell Transplantation Program at Cedars-Sinai. He also became an active member of the hospital staff, holding several positions and participating in the training of medical residents.

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In 1987, the Tower Hematology Oncology Medical Group was beginning to take form. Decker was friendly with the other doctors that would later become the Tower Hematology Oncology Medical Group, especially Sol Hamburg. Decker recounts a story from their early days training at UCLA, where he pranked Dr. Hamburg by challenging him to a contest of on-the-spot calculations on the blackboard during a holiday party. “By the third problem, Sol threw his hands in the air in defeat,” Decker recalls with a chuckle.

Decker was eager to join the group. “They wanted to expand, and I was thrilled to be on board,” he says. “I opted to go into clinical practice, and the newly formed group was a great opportunity.”

Now over 30 years old, Tower Hematology Oncology Medical Group, a Cedars-Sinai affiliate, is dedicated to providing advanced cancer care in an atmosphere of compassion. Through its cutting-edge medical care and support services, the group conducts pioneering clinical trials and helps patients understand and cope with cancer diagnoses.

Tower Cancer Research Foundation funds much of the group’s research, an intimate relationship that dates back years. Decker is currently conducting clinical trials of a new hematology agent that is showing promising results. He serves on the Tower Board of Directors and is extremely passionate about the foundation’s role in moving us closer to a cure for cancer. “The work Tower is doing is tremendous, providing seed money for young researchers and some ongoing funding for more established researchers, leading to very productive results. I’m grateful to play a role in Tower.”

Outside of the office, Decker enjoys an active family life. He and his wife, Andrea, play golf in their free time; Decker is also an avid collector of sports memorabilia, especially baseball cards. The Deckers are very proud of their three sons, two of whom attended UC Berkeley, their mother’s alma mater. Their middle son is a graduate of Columbia University. Their first grandchild was born six months ago, and Decker and his wife try to visit San Francisco every month to see him.

Decker is proud of the accomplishments of Tower Cancer Research Foundation. “So many patients are thriving as a result of the advancements that Tower helped make possible,” he says. He’s looking forward to eliminating cancer, and believes that recent advancements are moving us closer to that goal. “At the end of the 20th century, we were still using poison to try to kill cancer cells,” he explains. “In the 21st century, because of the ability to decode the genome and sequence DNA, we can identify the proteins that are driving the growth of cancer cells, so that we can come up with medications that block their activity. Targeted therapies are the future, and it’s great to see Tower dedicating its resources there.”