# Henry T. Lynch, MD, Father of Cancer Genetics, Dies at 91

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June 10, 2019 By Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation

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Henry T. Lynch, MD (Damon Runyon Grantee 1969-70), father of cancer genetics, has passed away at age 91, leaving behind a lasting legacy in cancer research and treatment. When Lynch began his career, most scientists blamed cancer on environmental causes, such as carcinogenic chemicals and viruses. Hereditary explanations were dismissed, even shunned. As a result, he often struggled to secure funding for his radical research in the critical early years of his career.

Despite the skepticism of the medical community, he painstakingly put together family medical histories, convinced that there had to be a hereditary component to some forms of cancer. Eventually, he completed the first description of hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer, a form of colon cancer later renamed Lynch syndrome. In 1971, soon after receiving Damon Runyon funding, he identified a hereditary form of breast and ovarian cancer, which in the 1990s was linked to the BRCA genes. Besides colon, breast and ovarian cancers, Lynch documented hereditary forms of melanoma, prostate and pancreatic cancers. Recent research shows that up to 10 percent of cancers are inherited.

Lynch spent nearly his entire career at Creighton University in Omaha, where he founded the Hereditary Cancer Center in 1984.

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