Yale Cancer Center is widely recognized for the quality of its patient care and innovative research. Equally important is its mission of training the next generation of physicians and scientists to be leaders in their fields. The Therapeutic Radiology Residency Training Program and the Medical Oncology-Hematology Fellowship Program are two of the Cancer Center's training initiatives that are helping to fulfill this mission and continue Yale's tradition of educational excellence.

One of the oldest and largest programs of its kind in the country – there will be 14 residents as of July 2014 – the Therapeutic Radiology residency program has experienced tremendous growth over the last few years. The key difference that sets it apart from other programs is its culture, according to Lynn Wilson, MD, MPH, Professor of Therapeutic Radiology, who served as director of the program from 2004 to 2013. In many programs, residents are bogged down by menial tasks, but Dr. Wilson sought to change that, an evolution that began before he took over and took years to accomplish. “As far as I'm concerned, if whatever they're involved in doesn't have some level of educational basis associated with it, they shouldn't be doing it,” he said. Along with that, there is an atmosphere of collegiality and horizontal management that residents appreciate. “It's very easy to approach an attending to talk about a research opportunity or get advice on mentorship,” said Kimberly Johung, MD, who completed her residency in June before joining the faculty. “You don't feel a divide that you hear of or get a sense about in other programs.”

Roy Decker, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Therapeutic Radiology, recently took over as program director and has added a new clinical education program that uses a mix of didactic lectures, case-based review, and treatment planning sessions. So far the response from the residents has been enthusiastic. “Hearing it and then being asked to apply it in a more direct fashion has been a real eye opener for them,” he said.

Yale’s program offers unique clinical and research training opportunities. A collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) Clinical Scholars Program allows trainees interested in clinical investigation to spend six months participating in RWJ coursework followed by six months spent working on two research projects. Dr. Decker, an alumnus of the program, started a Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy Program about four years ago that has seen explosive growth and offers exciting training and educational opportunities for residents. Yale also participates in the American Board of Radiology Holman Pathway, which allows gifted residents to spend up to 21 months of time outside the clinic pursuing research.

The emphasis on research is apparent in both the Therapeutic Radiology Residency Training Program where all residents are given up to one year to pursue research, and the Medical Oncology/Hematology Fellowship Program, where half of the three-year program is devoted to clinical, translational, or basic science research that involves a hypothesis-driven approach.

Above and beyond the rich research and clinical environment, the fellowship program places a large emphasis on education. “Trying to efficiently educate them in basic science, how it translates into the clinic, and the fundamental clinical principles of oncologic and hematologic care is really a challenge,” said Jill Lacy, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine (Medical Oncology) and the program’s director, adding that the pace of change in hematology and oncology has been dizzying. Most of the clinical teaching is case-based, with many clinical conferences each week.

The fellowship program is focused on mentoring, with each fellow overseen by a committee that tracks his or her progress, helps the fellow understand the expectations and milestones of the program, and offers career advice. Mentors aren’t the only source of guidance, however. “Faculty welcome questions from fellows,” said Nataliya Uboha, MD, PhD, a fellow in the program. “You always know you can get your question answered within minutes.”

Both programs must adhere to rigorous requirements set forth by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and both are intensely competitive, an indication of their stellar reputations: The residency program typically receives as many as 250 applications for three positions, while the fellowship program usually has over 300 applicants for eight spots. Last year, three fellows received highly sought after Young Investigator Awards from the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the American Society of Hematology. “Having three of our fellows recognized for their research efforts on a national level was an honor for our program and reflects the strong commitment of our fellows to research,” said Dr. Lacy.