A pioneer in the field will deliver a state-of-the-art lecture on “A Fly Model of Diabetic Nephropathy” on Saturday, Nov. 19. Ross L. Cagan, Ph.D., is a professor in the department of developmental and regenerative biology as well as senior associate dean of the graduate school of biological sciences at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. He is also director of the Center for Personalized Cancer Therapeutics and co-founder of the biotechnology company Medros.

Dr. Cagan is an expert in using the fruit fly Drosophila to explore cell–cell signaling and epithelial patterning with a particular interest in translational science. He has pioneered the use of Drosophila to develop complex models of diabetes and of breast, lung, colorectal, and thyroid cancers. Taking advantage of a century of powerful genetic tools, his laboratory has developed complex, multigenic models of specific aspects of human disease to pursue polypharmacological as well as personalized approaches to treatment. His laboratory’s emphasis has been on in situ exploration of cellular phenomena using approaches that include live visualization, cell ablation, computational modeling, and high-throughput drug screening.

In addition to studying the mechanisms that direct diabetes and cancer, including diabetic nephropathy and diabetic cardiomyopathy, he has developed a novel robotics-based approach for screening whole animals for therapeutic drugs. He is conducting a clinical trial in which robotics-based screening of personalized fly avatars is used to develop tailored therapeutics for colorectal and thyroid cancer. His work helped lead to Food and Drug Administration approval of the first chemotherapy for medullary thyroid carcinoma.

Dr. Cagan is editor-in-chief of the journal Disease Models and Mechanisms and is on the editorial board of Breast Cancer: Targets and Therapy.

He received his doctoral degree in developmental neurobiology from Princeton University. After a postdoctoral fellowship at UCLA, he achieved the rank of professor at Washington University School of Medicine before joining the Icahn School of Medicine in 2007.

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