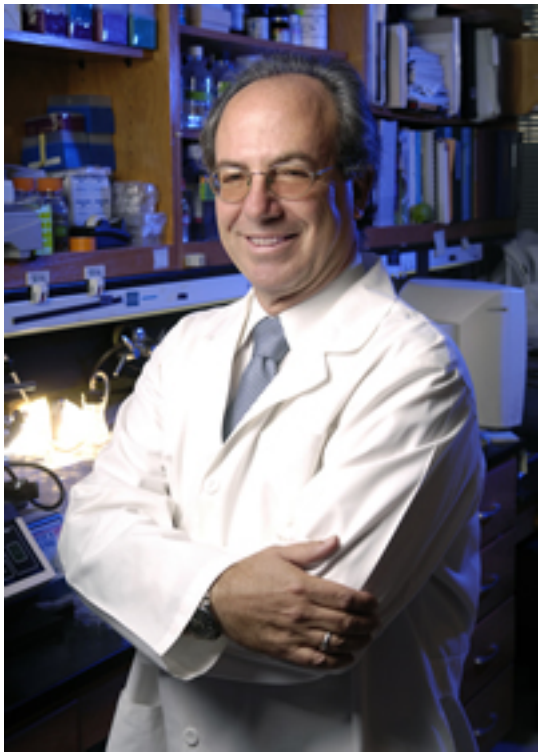

Donald Buchsbaum, Ph.D., is a senior scientist in the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center and director of the Division of Radiation Biology. A nationally recognized leader in the field of monoclonal antibodies, he is the principal investigator of the Cancer Center's Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE) grant in pancreatic cancer.

Q: Were you always interested in becoming a scientist?

A: My earliest passion was sports, especially baseball. Growing up in New York, I was a big fan of baseball, basketball, and tennis. But I learned that these were short-term careers for athletes. It wasn't until high school that I got interested in science.

Q: How did you become interested in tumor immunology?

A: I first learned about tumor immunology and using radiolabeled antibodies to treat cancer while I was a graduate student at the University of Rochester in New York. That really interested me because of the application of basic science to the treatment of cancer and the involvement of several different disciplines of science – chemistry, biochemistry, physics and biophysics.

Q: How did you end up at UAB?

A: I had gotten to know [Cancer Center director emeritus] Al LoBuglio, M.D., when I was working at the University of Michigan. After he had been at UAB a few years, he contacted me about joining UAB. I came to interview and was impressed with the faculty and the emphasis on translational research.

Q: What's some exciting research that you and your team are currently working on?

A: Obviously, the pancreatic SPORE is a major research focus. It will focus on novel biomarkers for improved diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and test new therapeutic agents that have shown promise in preventing, slowing or effectively treating the disease. The theme of the SPORE is translational research, and that's the area that I'm most interested in – the actual development of therapeutic agents and their application to clinical medicine.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your job?

A: I like the emphasis on developing new agents for cancer treatment. There's a rich environment here for this type of work. It's exciting to see years of research in preclinical studies move into clinical testing. My goal is that our research will benefit cancer patients, especially those with pancreatic cancer where curative treatments are not available.