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FEATURED THIS MONTH

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Quiet Celebrity: An Interview with Judah Folkman



The life of Judah Folkman took an unexpected turn one morning in May 1998. That day a front-page article in the *New York Times* announced that Folkman, a professor at Harvard Medical School, had discovered two natural compounds, angiostatin and endostatin, that dramatically shrank tumors in mice by cutting off the cancer's blood supply. The story included a quote from Nobel laureate James D.

Watson: "Judah is going to cure cancer in two years." Watson eventually backed off from that assertion, but the media frenzy had already exploded worldwide, transforming Folkman into a reluctant hero in the fight against cancer.

Folkman's ideas, which were initially met with skepticism by oncologists, are now the basis for an area of research that is attracting enormous interest. At least 20 compounds with an effect on angiogenesis are being tested in humans for a range of pathologies, including cancer, heart disease and vision loss. But the premature hype continues to engender disproportionate hope in the public, the press and the stock market. In this interview with SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, Folkman talks about his work and the progress of clinical trials on endostatin and angiostatin.

Ask the Experts

How does one determine the exact number of cycles a cesium 133 atom makes in order to define one second?

Physicist Donald B. Sullivan, chief of the time and frequency division of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, explains.

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