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For over 30 years, Dr. Baylin has studied the role of epigenetic gene silencing in the initiation and progression of human cancer. He and his colleagues fostered the concept that DNA hypermethylation of gene promoters, and associated transcriptional silencing, can serve as an alternative to mutations for producing loss of tumor suppressor gene function. They have described some of the classic genes involved, invented approaches to randomly screen the cancer genome for such genes and to demonstrate their functional role in cancer progression, helped begin unravel the molecular mechanisms responsible for the initiation and maintenance of the gene silencing, and utilized all of their findings for translational purposes. For the latter activity, Dr. Baylin currently co-leads, with Peter Jones, the Van Andel Research Institute, Stand up to Cancer (SU2C), Epigenetic Therapy Team. Baylin has authored or co-authored over 425 full-length publications on the above and other areas of cancer biology.

Dr. Baylin is currently co-Chief of the Cancer Biology Program of The Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center at Johns Hopkins and is the Virginia and D.K. Ludwig Chair in Cancer Research. Representative honors include: the 2003 Jack Shultz Memorial Lecture in Genetics, Fox Chase Cancer Center; the 2004 National Investigator of the Year Award from the NCI SPORE program; the 2005 Shubitz Cancer Research Prize from the University of Chicago; the 2008 The David Workman Memorial Award (with Peter A. Jones, Ph.D.) from the Samuel Waxman Foundation; the 2009 Kirk A. Landon-AACR Prize for Basic Cancer Research, (with Peter A. Jones); the 14th NCI Alfred G. Knudson Award in Cancer Genetics; and the 2011 American Cancer Society's Medal of Honor. He has been elected as a Fellow of the AACR Academy in 2014, to the National Academy of Sciences in 2017 and to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in 2020.