

In a Zen-like twist, findings by Irish researchers suggest new approaches to cervical cancer treatment might involve the healthy tissue around a tumor, rather than the malignant area itself.

The star of this show is the retinoblastoma protein (referred to as Rb) which, when depleted in healthy cells, encourages nearby cancer cells to invade, explain the researchers from Queen's University in Belfast. So the drill is simple: when Rb is feisty and active, cancer cells lurking in the neighborhood are less inclined to "come on over." When Rb is depleted, the cancer cells get a message that it's ok to move in to the healthy areas. Since nature makes the cancer aggressive anyway, not much encouragement is needed.

Writing in the abstract of their article, the Irish team leading this research said "Our data identify that stromal fibroblasts can alter the invasive behavior of the epithelium." In plain English: if we can figure out how to keep Rb up and running at full speed, cancer cells may be less likely to invade other, unaffected areas in the vicinity.

The Irish team's research focused on cervical and head/neck cancers, both prime areas of HPV-related diseases. The potential impact these findings may have with research into treating cancers in both sites (and elsewhere) is intriguing: HPV produces a sneaky protein of its own that binds to Rb and essentially degrades it, so a better understanding of that relationship might be key to keeping tumors from spreading. A summary of the study can be found [here](#).