

## **RU GUNAWARDANE, PH.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Ruwanthi (Ru) Gunawardane, Ph.D. is the Executive Director of the Allen Institute for Cell Science and was named to this position in December, 2020.

Ruwanthi (Ru) Gunawardane joined the Allen Institute after spending 5 years at Amgen where she worked on assay development for multiple drug targets spanning oncology, inflammation, and cardiovascular diseases. As a group and project leader, she worked in multidisciplinary teams to screen for novel therapeutics, characterize lead candidates, and advance the early drug discovery pipeline. She also contributed to the rapid development of cutting-edge technologies to streamline the drug discovery process by facilitating both internal and external collaborations. Prior to Amgen, Ru worked at Ambit Biosciences where she was part of a small team of scientists that identified and characterized AC220, a potent FLT3 kinase inhibitor that is currently in phase 3 trials for AML.

Ru obtained her Ph.D. in Biology from Johns Hopkins University where she studied the role of gamma tubulin complexes in microtubule nucleation in the *Drosophila* and *Xenopus* model systems. She combined molecular biology, biochemistry, and cell biology to identify novel components of these complexes and characterized their role in microtubule nucleation. She also used various microscopy methods including live video microscopy and electron microscopy to better understand the formation of these protein complexes. Ru went on to do her postdoctoral work with Joan Brugge at Harvard Medical School where she performed screens to identify novel genes that induce cell migration and invasion in mammary epithelial cells. She conducted some of these studies using 3D tissue culture model systems to better understand the role of these proteins during breast cancer progression. The genes identified from the screens were shared with the academic community through the Cell Migration Consortium.

Ru is excited to combine her experience in both academic and biotech settings with her passion for cell biology at the Allen Institute for Cell Science.