Dr. Nastaran (Nas) Zahir is the Acting Director of the Center for Cancer Training and Branch Director of the Cancer Training Branch at the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Dr. Zahir leads strategic initiatives for training in cancer research and designs operational frameworks for a portfolio of over a thousand fellowships, training grants, research education, and career development programs with annual NCI investments of over $230M. Dr. Zahir strives to foster collaborative team science and support cancer education, outreach, and advocacy activities spanning the cancer research continuum. In 2023, Dr. Zahir was inducted as a fellow of the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering, where she was recognized for her advocacy of training and support for engineering approaches to cancer research. Since 2023, she has served as vice co-chair of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Training Advisory Committee, which offers advice and recommendations across NIH on policy development, implementation, and enhancement of biomedical and behavioral research training, career development, and education activities. In 2020, Dr. Zahir served as Chair of the NCI Early Stage Investigator Activities Committee, which plays a key role in planning and implementing NCI priorities for scholars early in their research careers.

Prior to joining the Center for Cancer Training, Dr. Zahir served as Associate Director at the NCI Division of Cancer Biology from 2013-2021 where she coordinated interdisciplinary programs that integrate physical sciences and engineering perspectives and approaches with cancer research. Dr. Zahir joined NCI in 2009 as a program director and project scientist in the Office of Physical Sciences-Oncology after concluding a postdoctoral fellowship as an NIH intramural research training awardee.

Dr. Zahir's passion for advancing the integration of physical sciences and oncology stems from a decade of transdisciplinary research at the intersection of these fields. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Nuclear Engineering from the University of California, Berkeley while a research scientist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in the areas of plasma physics and radiation biology and imaging. Dr. Zahir received a Ph.D. in Bioengineering from the University of Pennsylvania at the Institute for Medicine and Engineering where she investigated spatial-mechanical regulation of mammary morphogenesis and therapeutic resistance. Her postdoctoral training was at the NIH National Institute of Arthritis, and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases where she studied stem cell biology in the context of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine. Throughout her career, Dr. Zahir has co-authored research publications in biological and physical sciences and served as a textbook editor. She has also taught undergraduate courses in cancer biology at the University of Pennsylvania and graduate courses in tissue engineering and regenerative medicine at the NIH Foundation for Advanced Education in the Sciences.