

## URI awarded \$2.5M grant to educate health care providers, students for improved geriatric care

KINGSTON – The University of Rhode Island has been awarded a \$2.5 million grant to implement a program for the state's health care workforce that will lead to higher quality care for older patients.

The Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program, an initiative of the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, is a \$35-million program aimed at preparing the health care professionals for the issues associated with advancing age. The program will train and educate providers, students and patients about the integrated, interprofessional delivery of health care often needed by older adults.

URI is one of 44 universities and organizations to receive the grant and is among 14 – including Johns Hopkins University, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the University of California-Los Angeles – that received the maximum allocation of \$2.5 million over three years. Other schools receiving grants include Yale University, Duke University and the University of Southern California. U.S. Department of Health and Human Service Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell announced the awards July 13 at the White House Conference on Aging.

The Rhode Island Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program aims to:

- Prepare health professions trainees to practice in and lead integrated geriatrics and primary care settings.
- Develop providers who can assess and address the needs of older adults and their families by integrating interprofessional geriatrics education into primary care delivery systems to provide coordinated, comprehensive, patient/family-centered health care.
- Develop and offer community-based education programs for patients, families and caregivers to improve the management of multiple chronic conditions.
- Provide Alzheimer's disease and related disorders education to health professions students, providers, patients, families and caregivers.

Rhode Island, in particular, has a clear need for investment in this type of training because it has the highest percentage of residents ages 85 and older in the nation. Geriatric patients – and their physicians – are often unaware of how the effects of aging can alter the type of care delivered to this population, according to Philip Clark, director of URI's Gerontology Program, professor of Human Development and Family Studies and director of the Rhode Island Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program.

"The reality is, treatment for geriatric patients can be considerably different from that of other adults," Clark said. "These differences can be subtle and, without the very specific training we can provide through this program, some primary care providers may not even be aware of them."

URI, in association with a host of partners – including Care New England, Brown University, Rhode Island College, the Rhode Island chapter of the Alzheimer's Association and Healthcentric Advisors, and networks of primary care providers – worked to identify the specific geriatrics education and training needs of the state's health care workforce. Subsequently, they developed a program responsive to those needs, with the goal of providing more tailored care.

"The partnerships forged as part of this successful collaborative agreement are ones that will bring positive change and increased awareness of the need for improved, individualized, and high-quality care for older adults to the entire state," said Dr. Ana Tuya Fulton, director of geriatric medicine at Care New England.

The variety of partners and the interprofessional nature of the education program will allow for more integrated and thorough care, according to Dr. Jeffrey Borkan, chairman of the department of family medicine at Brown University's Alpert Medical School.

"This grant provides a framework for meaningful collaboration across the state that will improve the care of the elderly through the creation of

interprofessional teams, integration of geriatrics into primary care, and outreach to underserved populations," Dr. Borkan said.

"This partnership is a model for the future and should help train the future generation of providers."

Clark emphasized that proper education across all health care professions, and at all levels – from

patients, to students to providers – is essential to the delivery of quality health care for older patients.

"The idea is to foster a team environment, with providers – including physicians, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, and other health professionals – learning to work with each other, with students and with their patients to deliver quality health care," Clark said. "Older people are affected by chronic medical issues and have a variety of unique psychosocial needs. For example, their bodies react differently to medications than a younger adult might. Diseases can present very differently in older patients and primary care providers may not recognize the symptoms.

"Physicians are not trained in all of these areas, so we need the expertise of all those professions to meet the challenges faced by an aging population."

Alicia Curtin, director of geriatrics at Brown University's Alpert Medical School, said the grant will ensure that the next generation of health care professionals is prepared to meet the needs of these adults.

"This collaboration with the Rhode Island Geriatric Education Center at URI will strengthen our educational programs in training the next generation of health care professionals in medicine, nursing, pharmacy, nutrition, physical therapy and social work, to improve the care of older adults throughout the state of Rhode Island," Curtin said. ❖

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