

Brown launches the country's first four-year, integrated MD/MPA program

PROVIDENCE – A new dual-degree program at Brown University aims to train students in both medicine and health care policy and create the next generation of leaders in those intersecting fields. Students who complete the four-year program will earn both a doctorate of medicine (MD) and a master of public affairs (MPA).

“This degree program was developed knowing what knowledge and skills students will need if they want to effect change in health care moving forward,” said **DR. PAUL GEORGE**, assistant dean of medical education at Brown’s Warren Alpert Medical School. “It is important for us that students have an idea of what shapes health policy and gain practical experience in this arena, so that they will be facile in promoting health policy changes during their careers.”

This is the first integrated program of its kind in the U.S., in which students are able to complete their degrees in four years and take courses taught by both medical school and public policy faculty. Other institutions offer five- or six-year joint programs and sometimes require students to apply to a master of public affairs program only after their course of medical study is underway. At Brown, the degrees are integrated from the start.

Students must be admitted to the Warren Alpert Medical School before opting for the dual-degree track, in which they study with faculty from Brown’s Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. The integrated MD/MPA program has a June start date, and the first cohort of dual-degree students will be enrolled in the summer of 2017.

James Morone, director of the A. Alfred Taubman Center for American Politics and Policy, said, “This is an exciting program that reflects one of Brown’s great strengths – active

collaboration across the campus. Everyone can see the need for policy-savvy health care leadership. There’s nothing else like this program. This is a terrific collaboration that will benefit and educate the students in both medicine and policy.”

In the first year, students take courses in health systems science and public organizations management. They also begin a four-year Policy in Action consultancy, spending a half-day per week in a leading health care system, foundation or non-governmental organization, shaping and implementing a project with a real-world client.

In subsequent years, students engage in a longitudinal clerkship with a mentor physician. They work with an assigned panel of about 30 patients, whom they follow to health care settings ranging from the operating room to primary care doctors’ and specialists’ offices.

By the third year, MD/MPA students gain global policy experience by spending 10 days in an international setting where they meet with elected officials, entrepreneurs and lawmakers to examine how policy is constructed. Past sites for these immersion programs have included Sweden, Brazil, India and Cambodia.

This international emphasis is unique to the Watson Institute’s MPA program, the only program in the country to integrate an international policy experience into the core curriculum. ❖

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EpiVax awarded \$600,000 NIH grant to improve a vaccine for the H7N9 avian influenza virus

KINGSTON – University of Rhode Island Research Professor **ANNIE DE GROOT, MD**, and her team at EpiVax have been awarded a \$600,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health to improve a vaccine for the H7N9 avian influenza virus.

De Groot is the co-founder, chief executive officer and chief scientific officer of EpiVax, a Providence-based biotechnology company. She is also the director of the URI Institute for Immunology and Informatics, where she and her colleagues apply bioinformatics tools to develop vaccines for emerging infectious diseases.

The grant was from the Small Business Innovation Research program

at the National Institutes of Health. De Groot and URI associate professor Lenny Moise, the director of vaccine research at EpiVax, will oversee the research in collaboration with Ted Ross, director of the Center for Vaccines and Immunology at the University of Georgia.

The novelty of the program stems from the concept that vaccines can be “immune engineered” to be more effective, De Groot says. Re-engineering the viral proteins to produce more of an immune response without modifying their ability to generate protective antibodies to the original “wild-type” version is the major focus of the work under the new program, she says.

The H7N9 influenza has been called a “stealth virus” because of its ability to evade the human immune response, both in natural infections and in vaccine formulations. H7N9 vaccines developed using conventional methods have significantly underperformed in clinical trials. De Groot says that the EpiVax program aims to re-engineer H7N9 viral proteins to be more easily detected by the immune system, resulting in a more potent vaccine product.

The first version of the vaccine from EpiVax will soon enter a trial in Australia in collaboration with Vaxine in Australia and Protein Sciences Corp. in Connecticut. ❖