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Miriam Hospital receives $9.4M grant for antibiotics resistance research center

The federal grant will create a Center for Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) to address the worldwide threat of drug-resistant “superbugs”

PROVIDENCE – The increasing worldwide threat of drug-resistant pathogens will be the focus of a new research center to be established at The Miriam Hospital thanks to a $9.4 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The five-year grant to create an NIH Center for Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) will allow researchers at The Miriam Hospital, its Lifespan affiliate, Rhode Island Hospital, and Brown University to delve into the causes of antibiotic resistance and identify potential new drugs.

“Resistance to antimicrobial therapies is a national and international crisis that threatens clinical practice from primary care to the most advanced medical interventions like organ transplantation and cancer chemotherapy. Infections caused by antibiotic resistant bacteria are major problems in the community and in inpatient health care settings. According to data from the CDC, more than 2 million people suffer infections from antibiotic-resistant bacteria each year in the United States and at least 23,000 people die as a result,” said ELEFTHERIOS MYLONAKIS, MD, chief of infectious diseases at The Miriam Hospital and Rhode Island Hospital and the principal investigator for the new center.

“Despite this clinical and financial burden, the supply of new antibiotics from major pharmaceutical companies has diminished dramatically in recent years. New research from laboratories at academic institutions, however, demonstrates there are promising alternative approaches to understand antibiotic resistance and discover new antimicrobial agents.”

This is the second COBRE grant received by a Lifespan affiliate in as many months. In August, Rhode Island Hospital received an $11.8 million, five-year grant for a COBRE to study ways to curb the opioid epidemic sweeping across Rhode Island and the nation. In all, Lifespan affiliates are the main institutions for five ongoing COBREs, with total funding of more than $42.7 million.

The new Center for Antimicrobial Resistance and Therapeutic Discovery (CARTD) will foster the work of existing researchers while encouraging junior investigators to devote their talents toward this growing public health issue. Its multidisciplinary approach will build on existing research at The Miriam Hospital and Lifespan to create an innovative, state-of-the-art biomedical research center that can serve as a resource for other researchers and investigators in the region.

The following are among the up-and-coming researchers already identified as CARTD researchers:

• BETH FUCHS, a researcher at Rhode Island Hospital and assistant professor at Brown, who will use laboratory roundworms to study methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), one of the most commonly recognized drug-resistant pathogens, or “superbugs.” She will investigate the potential treatment effectiveness of the anti-inflammatory compound auranofin and the medicinal herb extract shikonin.

• PETER BELENCKY, assistant professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at Brown, who will study the impacts of antibiotics on a body’s microbial community, the microbiome, to better understand the mechanisms that promote drug resistance.

Mylonakis is a highly regarded researcher on antimicrobial resistance. Earlier this year, a team that he led published a study in Nature on the identification of retinoids as a new class of antibiotics in the fight against drug resistance. He is a clinical physician for Lifespan and Brown Medicine and the Charles C.J. Carpenter Professor of Infectious Disease at Brown’s Alpert Medical School.

The intent of federal COBRE grants is to establish leadership and mentorship by experienced researchers, overseeing and supporting the work of three to five junior investigators in thematic, multidisciplinary centers, until those researchers establish a body of work to enable them to secure their own independent funding. Over the possible 15-year span of COBRE’s three phases, this builds the institution’s capacity and expertise in a given area. Today’s announcement is for a phase one COBRE grant.

A letter supporting the application for the COBRE grant was signed by all four members of Rhode Island’s Congressional delegation.

“When it comes to addressing the largest public health issues of our time, some of the most important research is taking place right here in Rhode Island at Lifespan-affiliated hospitals,” said TIMOTHY J. BABINEAU, MD, president and CEO of Lifespan. “I’m proud that we have been able to recruit and retain renowned experts whose efforts are being rewarded with the resources they need to fight disease and illness. Our ability to secure these grants not only allows these researchers and their staffs to carry out their vital work but also helps support investment and jobs in Rhode Island’s growing knowledge and healthcare economies.”
JWU, URI now offering dual degree program in PharmD, PA studies

Johnson & Wales University [JWU] and The University of Rhode Island [URI] are offering a dual degree in pharmacy and physician assistant studies beginning this fall – the first such collaboration between public and private universities in the country.

URI Doctor of Pharmacy [PharmD] students can apply to JWU’s Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (MSPAS) program after completing their fourth year of the 6-year pharmacy program. Applications began in the spring.

Officials at both schools said the program breaks new ground in public-private partnerships and greatly expands career opportunities for students in the health professions.

“Bridging the public-private university divide is significant,” said DONALD H. DEHYES, URI provost and vice president for academic affairs. “This partnership benefits both institutions and ultimately the health and well-being of Rhode Islanders.”

Up to two URI students will be accepted to the program each year, and upon completion, will graduate with a degree from each university: Doctor of Pharmacy from URI and Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies [MSPAS] from JWU.

“This dual degree will certainly set these graduates apart from their peers, and provide unique opportunities for pharmacy students interested in direct patient care,” said E. PAUL LARRAT, dean of URI’s College of Pharmacy.

CHRISTINE M. COLLINS, director of pharmacy for Lifespan, sees great value in the dual-degree offering.

“This partnership reflects what we see every day in the health care setting,” she said. “Medications are an important, but complex, component of care to help many of our patients get healthy and stay healthy. In our hospitals and ambulatory practices, pharmacists and physician assistants work together to give our patients the expertise of both. Graduates of this new program will have combined that expertise, strengthening the delivery of care.”

Johnson & Wales became the first university in the state to offer a master’s degree in physician assistant studies when it launched the program in 2014. Today, more than 70 students are enrolled.

“Pharmacy studies and physician assistant studies are a good educational fit, and graduates holding both degrees will bring a high-level of expertise to their care,” said GEORGE BOTTOMLEY, DVM, PA-C, director of JWU’s Center for Physician Assistant Studies.

There is great need for highly skilled health-care providers who can assess, diagnose, treat and prescribe, not only in Rhode Island but around the country. Graduates holding dual degrees could help fill that need in hospitals, private practices, community-based health centers and rural and underserved areas.

Pharmacy students will begin their physician assistant studies the summer after they are accepted to the program. The students will then alternate pharmacy and physician assistant coursework and clinical practicums, attending school year-round.

The dual degree will add one year to the PharmD timeline. URI students will pay tuition to JWU while enrolled in MSPAS clinical rotations.

The only other dual pharmacy and physician assistant degree programs in the country are offered at the University of Washington and the University of Kentucky, both public institutions.
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Partnership receives $2.5M to address substance use among gay/bisexual men

The Miriam Hospital, Project Weber/RENEW and the Rhode Island Public Health Institute to collaborate on new initiative to serve at-risk black and Latino men

PROVIDENCE – The Miriam Hospital has received a $2.5 million federal grant to partner with Project Weber/RENEW and the Rhode Island Public Health Institute to improve substance use and mental health treatment for gay and bisexual men. The five-year grant, awarded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), will help establish the first program in Rhode Island dedicated to providing substance use treatment services for black and Latino men, a group at high-risk for HIV.

According to state-by-state data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, Rhode Island had the ninth highest rate for drug overdose deaths in 2016. Moreover, barriers to substance use treatment disproportionately impact black and Latino men.

“This grant offers a great opportunity to expand our substance treatment services among gay and bisexual men, especially given the concerning opioid epidemic we are facing,” said PHILIP A. CHAN, MD, medical director of The Miriam Hospital’s STD Clinic.

MEGAN PINKSTON-CAMP, PhD, a psychologist with the Ryan White Behavioral Medicine program at The Miriam, said, “We are committed to addressing the overlapping substance use and mental health concerns by reaching out to and providing treatment in this underserved population. This new grant represents another facet of Rhode Island’s innovative approach to dealing with addiction and recovery, and builds on Project Weber/RENEW’s years of work advocating for the population of high-risk people.”

Project Weber/RENEW is a peer-based program providing harm reduction and recovery services to sex workers and high-risk men and women, including transgender people. The program has worked with clients at the intersection of substance use disorder and HIV risk for many years. The grant will enable Project Weber/RENEW to provide clinical services as well as expand its peer-based outreach and drop-in services.

The third partner is The Rhode Island Public Health Institute (RIPHI), which will evaluate and monitor the success of the new initiative and assist with outreach and programs. The institute is led by AMY NUNN, ScD, who has many years of experience working collaboratively with community leaders to address health disparities.
RIDOH Health Equity Summit focuses on building healthy and resilient communities

More than 700 community members, legislators, municipal leaders, members of the business community, and representatives from fields including public health, healthcare, law enforcement, and education gathered on Sept. 20th at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH)’s third annual Health Equity Summit to discuss how to build healthier, more resilient communities, and a healthier, more resilient Rhode Island.

In more than 60 different workshops, attendees examined how certain health issues affect specific communities differently, and how to partner with communities to address those health issues in ways that improve health and economic opportunities for all Rhode Islanders. The workshops at the Summit included sessions on healthy aging, transgender health, healthy housing, climate change, mental health, infant mortality, and gentrification, among dozens of other topics. The theme of the Summit was Building Healthy and Resilient Communities.

“No matter what you look like, what you sound like, where you live, or who you love, everyone deserves the chance to be as healthy as possible and to live in as healthy a community as possible,” said Director of Health NICOLE ALEXANDER-SCOTT, MD, MPH. “To make this a reality, we need to work together to build healthy and resilient communities that bounce forward after adverse events, such as those related to climate change, and that support healthy living for everyone. Today’s Health Equity Summit was a critical step in this process, and in coming together to put action to our talk about building a healthier, more resilient Rhode Island.”

Different health outcomes for different communities, also referred to as health disparities, exist throughout Rhode Island. For example:

- Teenagers living in rural areas of Rhode Island report some of the highest rates of drug, alcohol, and cigarette use in the state;
- Individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are diagnosed with depression at double the rate of Rhode Islanders who do not identify this way [44% have ever had a diagnosis of depression, versus 22%];
- The infant mortality rate for African-American Rhode Islanders is almost double the state average (11.2 per 1,000 live births, as opposed to 6.6); and
- More than half of Native American children in Rhode Island (54%) live in poverty.

Differences in health outcomes like these are the result of different community-level factors, such as exposure to marketing of unhealthy products, access to transportation and health services and care, education, job opportunities, social supports, housing, and discrimination. Factors such as these are described as the socioeconomic and environmental determinants of health.

Because health outcomes are overwhelmingly determined by these community-level factors, many of RIDOH’s public health interventions are now focused in communities, led by our communities. The most prominent example is Rhode Island’s Health Equity Zones (HEZs). HEZs are community-led Collaboratives in nine regions throughout the state that are working to address these underlying, community-level determinants of health. For example, the Washington County HEZ has worked to address mental health concerns among residents by providing evidence-based, mental health first aid and suicide prevention training to more than 1,000 police officers, clergy members, teachers, parents, and staff of youth-serving organizations. As a result of the HEZ infrastructure pulling the community together the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Association awarded the Washington County HEZ, Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds a
A $2 million grant to reach zero suicides. A second example is the work of the Pawtucket and Central Falls HEZ to revitalize a dilapidated city building in Pawtucket to create affordable housing units, a job training program for youth, and a market and kitchen space with locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables and healthy prepared foods, called Harvest Kitchen.

The keynote speaker at the Summit was Edward P. Ehlinger, MD, MSPH, a former Minnesota Health Commissioner.

In addition to the wide range of communities and fields represented at the Summit, representatives from several State agencies participated in dialogues about how to improve health outcomes for the Rhode Islanders they serve. Those agencies included the Executive Office of Health and Human Services; the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management; the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Affairs; the Rhode Island Department of Corrections; the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families; the Rhode Island Department of Education; the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals; the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner; and Health Source RI.

The Health Equity Summit was also an opportunity for Dr. Alexander-Scott to launch the 2019 President’s Challenge for the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO). As Rhode Island’s Director of Health, Dr. Alexander-Scott’s yearlong term as the President of ASTHO, which is the national organization for state health directors, begins this month, giving the opportunity to elevate Rhode Island’s leadership in health equity. The theme of the President’s Challenge mirrors the theme of the Health Equity Summit: Building Healthy and Resilient Communities. ASTHO will be working over the coming year with state and territorial health departments to help them implement initiatives that, similar to the HEZ initiative in Rhode Island, are focused on addressing the factors in people’s communities that most significantly impact health outcomes. The challenge is aligned with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the U.S. Surgeon General’s focus on community health and economic prosperity.

Teach

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More than 650 swimmers of all ages and skill levels participated in the ninth annual Swim Across America fundraising swim at Roger Wheeler State Beach in Narragansett this month, raising more than $220,000 to support research in Women & Infants Hospital’s Center for Biomarkers and Emerging Technologies (CBET), an initiative of the Program in Women’s Oncology, and the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.

Swim Across America raises more than $220,000 to benefit women’s cancer research at W&I

More than 650 swimmers of all ages and skill levels participated in the ninth annual Swim Across America fundraising swim at Roger Wheeler State Beach in Narragansett recently, raising more than $220,000 to support research in Women & Infants Hospital’s Center for Biomarkers and Emerging Technologies (CBET), an initiative of the Program in Women’s Oncology, and the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine.

The swim is organized by Swim Across America, a national organization dedicated to raising money and awareness for cancer research, prevention, and treatment. Swimmers included cancer survivors, patients and family members, physicians and staff from the Program in Women’s Oncology, the Rhode Island Masters Swimmers, high school and club teams, and Olympians.

College swim teams from across the region – including Providence College, University of Connecticut, Bryant University, Brown University, Roger Williams University, University of Rhode Island, Assumption College, Boston University, Northeastern, Connecticut College, and Holy Cross – attended, creating one of the largest groups of college athletes in an open-water swim in the country. Providence College was the top fundraising school, raising more than $30,000.

Pictured from left to right at Swim Across America Rhode Island are volunteers Tina Kelly (medical records chart specialist, Women & Infants Hospital), Lori Johnson (clinical education manager, Women & Infants Hospital), Rick Majzun (president and chief operating officer, Women & Infants Hospital), Clara Lamore Walker (former Olympic swimmer who medaled in the 1948 Olympic games), and Vickie Walters (director of workforce development, Care New England).
Zero Suicide initiative in Washington County receives $2M
Funding will help establish wide-ranging screening program for health care providers

WASHINGTON D.C. – On September 10, U.S. Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse, U.S. Representative Jim Langevin, and Rhode Island Department of Health Director NICOLE ALEXANDER-SCOTT, MD, announced $2 million in federal funding for South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds’ Zero Suicide in Washington County program. The funding will help establish a new, wide-ranging program for health care providers across the region to screen for the warning signs of suicide and provide vital services to further assess and care for those at risk of suicide.

Washington County has the highest rate of suicide in Rhode Island.

To combat this problem, South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds – one of the state’s ten Health Equity Zones – will use the $2 million from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to improve mental health care with the goal of eliminating suicides, hence the name “Zero Suicide.”

The program will include all major health care institutions in Washington County. It will set up a countywide leadership team with representatives from participating health care organizations and suicide survivors and/or family members. The program will train all staff at health care facilities, provide timely services, coordinate outreach to patients in need, and conduct routine reviews of suicide attempts to identify trends or opportunities for future prevention efforts.

“Zero Suicide is both a system and a culture change; it is also the most effective program proven to drastically reduce suicides in health care systems,” noted DR. ROBERT HARRISON, Project Director for the initiative. “Yale New Haven Health/Westerly Hospital is proud to collaborate with South County Health and every other major health care organization in the region to prevent the most preventable death - suicide - in Washington County.”

“We can mount this program in South County because of the strength of South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds, a collaboration of healthcare providers, the school systems, URI, our community action agency, business partners and many other social service agencies,” said LOU GIANCOLA, President and CEO of South County Health.

“Making sure health care professionals have the training and resources to lend care and support to those fighting depression and thoughts of suicide will go a long way toward getting us to zero suicides,” said Senator Whitehouse.

Of people who die by suicide, 30 percent had recent contact with mental health providers, 45 percent – including 70 percent among older men – had recent contact with primary care providers, and 10 percent visited an emergency department. That is why the World Health Organization recommends that “health-care services need to incorporate suicide prevention as a core component.”

EXHIBIT
Trapped in the Middle: The Effect of Income and Health Inequality on the Middle Class in America

The Brown University School of Public Health and the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs present: Trapped in the Middle: The Effect of Income and Health Inequality on the Middle Class in America, an exhibition by photo-journalist JULIAN FISHER, MD, on view from October 1–December 14, 2018 at 121 South Main Street, Providence and the digital exhibit continues at 111 Thayer Street at the Watson Institute.

An Artist’s Talk and Opening Reception will be held Monday, October 1, 2018 at 4 pm, 121 South Main Street, 3rd Floor, Providence.

Dr. Fisher studied at Yale with Walker Evans. His work has appeared in the New York Times, Time, Newsweek, Life, and The Atlantic. He pursued a medical degree and is presently a neurologist on the Harvard medical faculty at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston. He has returned to photojournalism for this project and is at work on a project to capture America’s history over the past half-century. He lives and works in Brookline, MA.