

Lifespan and Care New England move forward with Letter of Intent to merge

Lifespan and Care New England have moved to the next step in their affiliation process.

LAWRENCE A. AUBIN, SR., board chair of Lifespan, and **CHARLES R. REPUCCI**, board chair for Care New England, announced that both boards voted September 8th to move forward with a letter of intent to merge Lifespan and Care New England into a single entity.

The combined system would create a Rhode Island-based, nonprofit academic medical center with Brown University. The new system would include seven hospitals offering a full complement of specialty, women's and children's, and behavioral health, and visiting nurse services, research, and education. More than 23,500 employees would serve the people of Rhode Island and Southeastern New England, from prenatal care and delivery to elder care. The two organizations had collaborated on several initiatives related to the current pandemic. In early June, they announced their intent to study a more formal partnership.

"This affiliation will help build an even stronger future for our organizations while maintaining a strong

commitment to Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. We look forward to continuing this collaboration, sharing additional details about our vision for health care delivery as we begin the regulatory process," said Charles R. Reppucci.

"By combining the talent, experience and resources of our two organizations, we can create a national model that fully leverages the integration and coordination of care. In doing so, we are better equipped to meet market challenges and mandates to improve outcomes while reducing health care costs," said Lawrence A. Aubin, Sr.

"By working together, Lifespan, Care New England, and Brown University can create a fully integrated academic healthcare system for the people of Rhode Island," said Lifespan president and CEO **TIMOTHY J. BABINEAU, MD**. "Combining our investment in our physicians, clinical staff, researchers, technology and other health care staff will greatly help us continue to fulfill our mission of providing world-class health care to our patients, advancing

medical discoveries and serving as a vital economic engine for our state."

"After careful consideration, there is clear recognition of the value of a more formal relationship. Overall benefit, regarding the capabilities and reach of what is possible for the health care of our local communities, has been defined with a clear, high-level vision of what could be possible," said Care New England President and CEO **JAMES E. FANALE, MD**.

"A unified academic medical center with Brown University, Lifespan, and Care New England has always been the best solution for health care in Rhode Island," said **CHRISTINA H. PAXSON**, president of Brown University. "I could not be more thrilled with this announcement. Capitalizing on the complementary strengths of our health care institutions with Brown University will make it possible to provide high-quality low-cost health care, attract and retain the best physicians, and grow our research enterprise while powering the Rhode Island economy." ❖

Lifespan/Brown form COVID-19 Biobank at RIH Clinical Research Center

Lifespan and Brown-based Advance Clinical and Translational Research (Advance-CTR) have established a COVID-19 Biobank, housed at Rhode Island Hospital's Clinical Research Center, to facilitate research in Rhode Island. The Biobank, formed in May, includes the following samples:

- Plasma (0.5mLs)
- LI plasma (0.5mLs)
- Serum (0.5mLs)
- PBMCs (0.25mLs / ~2.5M cells)

Demographic data is available for each sample, as well as medical history and COVID-19 clinical actions.

A multi-institutional committee composed of representatives from Brown,



The University of Rhode Island, Lifespan, Care New England, and the Providence VA Medical Center will review requests on a rolling basis.

All investigators at degree-granting institutions in Rhode Island are eligible to request access to COVID-19

specimens. For sample distribution, an IRB approval or exempt letter from an institution is required. If the researcher is not affiliated with Lifespan, data requests and sharing of specimens will require a Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) or Data Use Agreement (DUA), as applicable. Institutional Authorization Agreements (IAAs) must be established between non-Lifespan investigators' home institutions and Lifespan.

Investigators are required to cite Advance-CTR on any grants, publications, presentations and/or other products that result from access to the COVID-19 Biobank. ❖

For more information, contact AdvanceRI@brown.edu. Website: <https://www.brown.edu/initiatives/translational-research/covid-19-biobank>

Rhode Island Hospital authors publish study on health disparities and influenza in Rhode Island

Study reveals differences in infection rates, hospitalization rates, based on measures of socioeconomic status

PROVIDENCE – Public Health Reports has published a study co-authored by Rhode Island Hospital Medical Director of Epidemiology and Infection Control and Brown University Professor of Medicine **LEONARD A. MERMEL, DO, ScM**, along with **KORI OTERO, MPH**, a recent graduate of The School of Public Health at Brown University.

The study, “Health Disparities Among People Infected with Influenza,” assessed Rhode Islanders with documented influenza during four respiratory virus seasons (Fall 2013 through Spring 2018) in Rhode Island to determine if health disparities were associated with risk of getting influenza, and if such disparities impacted the likelihood of severe disease manifested by a need for hospitalization. To address this issue, the authors measured median household income and educational level of influenza-infected patients.

Among the findings, there was a significantly greater number of confirmed influenza cases per 100,000 person-years^[1] in populations with low versus high median household income. Greater numbers were also documented in populations with low versus high educational attainment. Further, the risk of a severe influenza infection was significantly greater in the population with the lowest educational attainment. However, an unexpected finding was that the risk of severe influenza was also associated with a higher median household income.

Dr. Mermel notes that, “Our hypothesis was that we would find health disparities related to risk of influenza. This may be due to a lower access to primary care, less time available to receive influenza vaccination, and crowding living conditions.”

“This finding may help to focus public health interventions in Rhode Island and elsewhere,” said Otero.

Lifespan’s own Community Health Institute (LCHI) serves as a “community immunizer” in an effort to overcome possible issues of access to flu vaccine, targeting adults who are medically fragile, uninsured, without a medical home, isolated or without transportation. In the 2019–2020 flu season, its clinics provided immunizations to 844 adults, with numbers climbing each year since 2015. Clinics are currently being scheduled for Fall 2020, and community and faith-based organizations are invited to partner with the LCHI to host a flu clinic by calling 401-444-8063 or emailing mstepanian@lifespan.org.

The unexpected finding of increased hospitalization associated with higher household income may reflect a greater proportion of older adults in the higher socioeconomic groups, says Dr. Mermel, as well a possible intrinsic bias leading to a greater likelihood of hospitalization among people with higher socioeconomic status than among people with lower socioeconomic status.

“This study presaged some of the events occurring today with COVID-19, as health disparities remain a top-of-mind issue in addressing the needs of all Americans.” ❖

URI Community First Responder Program offers free Narcan and training to rural Rhode Islanders to prevent overdose deaths

SOUTH KINGSTOWN – The Rhode Island Department of Health estimates that 308 Rhode Islanders died of an opioid-related overdose in 2019 and the first quarter of 2020 has seen a 22% increase in overdose deaths compared with the first quarter of 2019.

In an effort to combat this crisis, specifically in rural communities around the state, the University of Rhode Island launched the Community First Responder Program (CFRP), which offers free online learning modules on how to administer the life-saving medicine naloxone (Narcan). To see the free education and resources offered, visit uri.edu/cfrp/

CME credits

The program also offers separate resources specifically for healthcare professionals licensed in Rhode Island, including providers, pharmacists, nurses, social workers, and mental health counselors. These professionals can earn free continuing education credits through the interactive, educational modules on naloxone, telehealth, medications for opioid use disorder and laws related to opioid prescribing/dispensing.

In addition, the CFRP has begun reaching out to Rhode Island schools, community organizations and businesses that may benefit from knowing how to recognize and respond to an opioid-related breathing emergency. If an organization wants to train a group of people, the CFRP team is ready to conduct 45-minute live group seminars over video conferencing. Schools, community organizations, or workplaces that want to help combat the opioid crisis can schedule a Webex seminar for groups by submitting a request on URI CFRP’s website: uri.edu/cfrp/ ❖

Lifespan mounts public campaign to promote federal efforts to recruit volunteers for essential COVID-19 vaccine trials

Immunology Center at The Miriam Hospital is encouraging volunteers to visit National Institutes of Health registry and is awaiting selection as a vaccine trial site

PROVIDENCE – Lifespan has joined the COVID-19 Prevention Network – an initiative of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases – and is actively supporting federal efforts to develop a vaccine for COVID-19 by helping to identify participants for vital clinical trials. This week Lifespan is kicking off a local campaign to promote the COVID-19 Prevention Network’s Volunteer Screening Registry statewide.

Lifespan is spearheading this public effort through The Immunology Center at The Miriam Hospital, which has a long and successful track record of participating in major clinical trials, including drugs for HIV and hepatitis C. More recently, it was among one of the most active sites in the world testing the use of remdesivir to treat COVID-19 patients.

Lifespan has created a website – www.lifespan.org/covidvax – that links to the COVID-19 Prevention Network (CoVPN)’s registry, where those interested in participating in clinical trials for a vaccine may sign up to volunteer in a local trial should one become available. Lifespan has also launched a digital campaign on social media platforms to raise awareness of the registry, which was launched by the National Institutes of Health.

The Immunology Center at The Miriam Hospital is awaiting selection as a COVID-19 vaccine trial site. Lifespan encourages those who are interested

in being part of a future study to visit www.lifespan.org/covidvax and complete the CoVPN Volunteer Screening Registry survey using the code “LIFE.”

“Lifespan remains committed to making a healthcare impact that can be felt on a local, national and international level. This commitment is evidenced not only by the more than one-thousand COVID-19 patients we have cared for, but is also exhibited in our willingness to take the lead in the coordination of an effective statewide response to the spread of the virus. And while our efforts thus far have helped position Rhode Island to be among the nation’s best sites at limiting the spread of COVID-19, we will continue to leverage our clinical and scientific expertise to meet this moment. Lifespan’s involvement with the registry is one more way that we can make a national impact, said **MICHAEL HENDERSON**, Vice President for Research for Lifespan. “We strongly encourage those who wish to join the fight against COVID-19 to please consider volunteering for a trial and signing up through the CoVPN registry.”

The CoVPN Volunteer Screening Registry was established by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The registry is part of the federal government’s initiative, “Operation Warp Speed,” to undertake a public-private effort to accelerate the development,

manufacturing and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Funding for Lifespan’s public campaign comes from a \$250,000 grant that The Miriam Hospital obtained from NIAID for COVID-19 emergency response efforts, including CoVPN support. It is being led by infectious diseases physician **KAREN TASHIMA, MD**, director of clinical trials at The Immunology Center and clinical research site leader for The Miriam Hospital, a research site of the Harvard/Boston/Providence AIDS Clinical Trials Group.

Dr. Tashima helped oversee the enrollment at Lifespan of nearly 200 patients in the remdesivir study, which was conducted under the auspices of a Food and Drug Administration emergency use authorization and part of an international study sponsored by drug maker Gilead Sciences, Inc.

“Clinical trials are essential for identifying therapies that can prevent and treat disease and volunteers play a critical role when it comes to developing vaccines to rapidly respond to dangerous pandemics,” Dr. Tashima said. “We appreciate the selfless contribution of volunteers for these trials and encourage anyone who would like to participate to go to our website and volunteer at the registry. Don’t forget to enter “LIFE” when prompted for a code; that will flag you as a candidate for a clinical trial at Lifespan, which we hope will happen soon.” ❖