UNC-CH NEWS RELEASE

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UNC-CH and partners receive $54.6 million to help improve health status of North Carolinians

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has been awarded a new five-year $54.6 million Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) from the National Institutes of Health. With the new award, UNC will partner with two institutions—RTI International and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University—to accelerate the pace at which clinical and translational research directly benefits patients and communities in North Carolina.

“At UNC, research is much more than an ivory tower exercise,” said Vice Chancellor for Research Barbara Entwisle. “As a state university, we have a special obligation to serve North Carolina. This award supports our mission by moving discoveries into practice, helping to spin out new life science businesses, and funding hands-on projects to improve the health of our citizens.”

Launched in 2006, the NIH-led CTSA program has enabled innovative research teams to speed discovery and advance science aimed at improving the nation’s health. Institutional CTSA awards are at the centerpiece of the program, providing academic homes for translational sciences. The program currently supports a consortium of approximately 60 academic medical institutions that is fostering team science, leveraging national resources and transforming the way biomedical research is conducted across the country.

The grant will provide another five years of funding for the North Carolina Translational and Clinical Sciences (NC TraCS) Institute, which is now recognized as the central entity on the UNC campus responsible for the advancement of clinical and translational research. Since its inception in 2008 as the home of UNC’s CTSA, NC TraCS has fundamentally changed the clinical and translational research landscape at UNC and across the state, with outreach efforts touching each of North Carolina’s 100 counties.

Among its many achievements, NC TraCS provided personalized medicine to 500 North Carolinians across 56 counties who participated in a trial that looked at the impact of a gene variant on the reoccurrence of breast cancer. The work led to an intervention in which patients received an adjusted chemotherapy dose based on subject’s personalized results.

A smaller project called “Research on Location” helped recruit Spanish-speaking women from one N.C. church and two community health centers
across two counties to participate in a pilot study to manage weight gain and prevent type 2 diabetes.

“The goal and mission of NC TraCS will continue to enable investigators, research units and academic programs to be even more successful in making lives better in our state’s communities,” said Marschall S. Runge, principal investigator of the CTSA at UNC, and executive dean for the School of Medicine.

To increase its impact and scope over the next five years, NC TraCS is expanding its integrated home on campus to include RTI International as a research partner and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University as a planning partner.

“We have a large and diverse portfolio of health research, spanning the continuum of clinical and translational science,” said Wayne Holden, president and chief executive officer of RTI International. “This grant provides us a significant opportunity to broaden our cross-institutional partnership with UNC and turn our research into practice to improve the health of North Carolinians. Few topics are more important than advancing health and well-being.”

The partnership with N.C. A&T will give UNC researchers access to the state-of-the-art laboratories at the Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering, while providing NC A&T faculty collaborative opportunities and financial resources to accelerate discoveries in the lab to patients, particularly those from underrepresented minorities.

“Together, we will develop a robust pipeline of minority clinical and translational research scientists in a manner that can be a model for the nation,” said Barry L. Burks, N.C. A&T’s Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development.

The three institutions will leverage each of their strengths to pursue and focus on three strategic initiatives:

1. Next-generation technologies to transform the nature of clinical research and practice
2. Robust comparative effectiveness studies to provide definitive evidence of the benefits and or harms of tests and treatments
3. New paradigms and resources to accelerate drug development

“Chapel Hill is a special place because of the collegiality of the faculty and the proximity of the health sciences schools – medicine, public health, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, and social work – and the College of Arts and Sciences,” said
William L. Roper, dean of the UNC School of Medicine, chief executive officer of UNC Health Care and vice chancellor for Health Affairs at UNC. “But the new partnership with RTI, the growing partnership with NC A&T, and our existing partnerships across the state truly enhance our ability to improve health for all North Carolinians.”

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In 2006, The CTSA program Its goals are to speed the translation of laboratory discoveries into treatments for patients, to engage communities in clinical research efforts and to train a new generation of clinical and translational researchers.

NCATS’ Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) program helps strengthen the full spectrum of translational research. Institutional CTSA awards are the centerpiece of the program, providing academic homes for translational sciences and supporting research resources needed by local and national research communities to improve the quality and efficiency of all phases of translational research. Institutional CTSAs also support the training of clinical and translational scientists and the development of all disciplines needed for a robust workforce for translational research.
Improve health status

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