Advancing Cancer Care for Underserved Patients in Southern Arizona

Expanding access to high-quality cancer care for underserved populations in southern Arizona is the goal of a new Family and Community Medicine research project.

“Working together with our community partners, we can improve access to high-quality cancer care with better outcomes.”

Heidi Hamann, PhD

Heidi Hamann, PhD, associate professor of Family and Community Medicine and Psychology, and a member of the UA Cancer Center in Tucson, is the lead investigator on the five-year, $1.9 million project, funded by the Merck Foundation Alliance to Advance Patient-Centered Cancer Care.

“Patient-centered” care is defined as respectful of, and responsive to, individual patient preferences, needs, and values, and ensures that a patient’s values guide all of the clinical decisions made in his or her care.

Underserved populations in southern Arizona may include rural, uninsured and underinsured patients; people with low socioeconomic status; and racial, linguistic and ethnic minorities, including Latinos, who are less likely to have cancer diagnosed early.

“We know that lower socioeconomic status is associated with cancer being diagnosed at later stages. It also can lead to reduced access to quality cancer care, and higher mortality rates Dr. Hamann says.

“There is a need to address cancer care barriers for underserved populations in Southern Arizona. The Merck Foundation funding will have a profound

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Advancing Cancer Care, continued...

effect on the lives of people in our region. Working together with our community partners, we can improve access to high-quality cancer care with better outcomes,” she says.

The UA is one of six organizations participating in the nationwide project. Project goals include:

• Increasing coordination of cancer care with primary care physicians and other health-care professionals
• Strengthening communication between the cancer specialist and the patient
• Providing culturally appropriate, evidence-based psychosocial and supportive care for underserved cancer patients and their families

Family and Community Medicine faculty who are co-investigators on the project are Leila Ali-Akbarian, MD, director of the Supportive Care Clinic at the UA Cancer Center in Tucson; Julie Armin, PhD, a medical anthropologist; and Patricia Lebensohn, MD, an expert in the practice of integrative medicine.

Other UA co-investigators are with the College of Nursing; the departments of Psychiatry, Communication and Psychology; the College of Public Health; and the College of Education.

Community partners include the Arizona Community Health Workers Association and the El Rio Community Health Center.

Volunteering With Head Start to Keep Kids Healthy

The parking lot is filling up fast at Child-Parent Centers on East 22nd Street, and so are the stairs leading to the make-shift clinic on the center’s second floor.

Fifty-five families signed up ahead of time to bring their children here this morning, to get the physical exams they must have to enroll in Head Start and Early Head Start. The federal programs provide children under 5, from low-income families, with education, nutrition and other services to help them get ready for their first years of school.

Victoria Murrain, DO, associate professor of Family and Community Medicine, says she and her colleagues have provided these free clinics three or four times a year, for about 15 years.

“These are all kids who either don’t have a primary care physician, or they can’t get in to see their doctor before the deadline,” Dr. Murrain says. “We usually see about 50 kids each time.”

“This is a great opportunity to work with a really in-need population. It reinforces the sense of community that’s part of being a doctor.”

Kylie Kenney, first-year medical student

Patient Adrienne Rivera receives a physical exam from the UA Health Sciences students and residents.

The clinics are inter-professional, staffed with medical students and residents in training to become family physicians or pediatricians, along with nursing students and pharmacy students. Dr. Murrain, and Family and Community Medicine physicians Krista Sunderman, MD, and Larry Moher, MD, are on hand to provide supervision.
It’s a sunny Saturday morning at Amphi High School, where the Southern Arizona chapter of Special Olympics is hosting a health fair for Special Olympics participants and aspiring athletes. Nearly 600 competitors – ranging in age from 6 to 72 – were outside competing in everything from wheelchair racing to an 800-meter walk and long jump.

Tammie Bassford, MD, associate professor of family and community medicine and medical director for Special Olympics in Southern Arizona, is also adviser to the UA College of Medicine – Tucson students who volunteer with the college’s student chapter of the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry, supported by the Special Hope Foundation since March 2014.

The students are checking athletes’ blood pressure, height and weight, and counseling athletes about exercise and healthy foods. To reinforce their message, some of the students are costumed as fruits and vegetables.

“This is an education program,” Dr. Bassford explains. “We talk with the athletes about not using tobacco, using sunscreen, and other things they can do to protect their health.”

Third-year UA medical student Aimee Le helped start the UA chapter for students interested in developmental medicine three years ago. She wants to be a pediatrician, focusing on children with disabilities. “My older brother was a special needs child, so my heart has always been there,” Aimee says.

Tyler Kennedy, a first-year UA medical student, is now co-leader with the student group. “My journey started with a younger cousin who was born with autism,” Tyler says. “I have seen how families struggle with the healthcare system, trying to connect with doctors that fully understand their needs.”

“This is great opportunity to work with a really in-need population. It reinforces the sense of community that’s part of being a doctor,” says first-year medical student Kylie Kenney.

Amalia Marines, mother of 4-year-old Emilio, says the clinic is a huge help to her and her family. “The people here are very, very nice,” she says. “They help us keep up with immunizations and exams, and they tell us about things that we might not remember to ask.”

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“Faculty, Students Team Up With Special Olympics”

From left to right: Tamsen Bassford, MD and medical students Aimee Le, Caila Lavine, Tyler Kennedy and Amanda Metcalf.

Medical student Audrey Nisbet, measures the height of a participating athlete.

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Medical student Audrey Nisbet, measures the height of a participating athlete.
For Medical School Grads, Two Residency Options

The Department of Family and Community Medicine offers two residency programs to medical school graduates who want to pursue careers in family medicine. The original family medicine residency program started in 1971 and turned out its first two graduates in 1974. In July 2010, the department launched its second residency program, with special emphasis on caring for rural and underserved populations. Each residency program accepts up to eight new physicians each year. We are proud to introduce you to three of our third-year residents who are completing their residency programs.

Myles Stone, MD-MPH, Medical School: UA College of Medicine – Tucson

“I’m spending six weeks in central Viet Nam, putting my training into practice. I’m working with a local physician to better quantify the non-communicable disease burden in the region. Our next steps will be to work with the ministry of health to build up the primary care system to better handle the shifting health needs from acute and infectious problems to chronic and non-communicable problems. I feel both fortunate and well-prepared for the opportunity, because of the rural health training I had with my South Campus residency.

After returning to the UA to complete residency, I’ll be working as a physician at the Whiteriver Indian Health Service hospital in Arizona. My responsibilities will include outpatient, inpatient, emergency, and obstetrical care. The breadth of experience I received during my time as a resident has certainly helped me feel prepared for this truly full-spectrum position.”

Androuw Carrasco, MD, Medical School: Michigan State University

“I grew up in Tucson, went to medical school at Michigan State, and then came back here for residency. One thing that attracted me to this program was the people I met when I interviewed here. These were people who I immediately identified as people I wanted to emulate.

“I finish here in June, and then head out to Contra Costa Medical Center near San Francisco, for a fellowship in global health and ultrasound. I really believe ultrasound is the new stethoscope. With a stethoscope, you can hear the heart sounds and infer what its function is like. With an ultrasound probe, you can see, in real time, how the heart is functioning, make clinical assessments more accurately, and, if applied correctly, improve patient care.

“I see myself working in a rural community, working internationally, teaching and collaborating with others working with in low resources settings. Day, night, clinic, inpatient, emergency room – it’ll be a busy life, but I don’t mind that because I like what I do. Sometimes, while on our hospital service, I play quirky guitar songs for patients on my service. It shows them a different face of medicine. I like that.”
Grace Price, MD, Medical School: Brown University, Rhode Island

“I grew up in Boston, but I’ve always been a ‘rural person.’ So as I was finishing medical school, I thought of family medicine in a rural community. That’s what brought me to Tucson. This is the only residency program I found where you are connected to a major academic medical center where you get all that great teaching, but here you also get the experience of dealing with an underserved urban population, and you get six full months of residency in rural sites, getting that hands-on training. I love Maine and I’m thrilled that I’m going to be working in rural Maine, with an organization that includes a small hospital and a clinic. So I’ll be doing outpatient and inpatient care, and obstetrics care. It’s exactly what I wanted, being able to do full-spectrum family medicine and live in the community where I work.”

To learn how you can support the work of the Department Family and Community Medicine please visit: http://fcm.arizona.edu/ways-give

Mobile Health Program Receives $80,831 from Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation

The Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation has awarded $80,831 to the University of Arizona College of Medicine – Tucson’s Mobile Health Program, to provide healthcare to underserved families and individuals in Pima County.

“We are very grateful for this generous grant, which will help our Mobile Health Program provide the best possible care to underserved pregnant women and their children and families in and around our community,””

Myra Muramoto, MD, MPH

The Mobile Health Program was established in 1976. Family and Community Medicine and Banner Health are the program’s primary funders.

“Mobile Health Program provide the best possible care to underserved pregnant women and their children and families in and around our community,” said Myra Muramoto, MD, MPH, head of the Department of Family and Community Medicine.

The Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation announced the award at its March 29 “Evening on the Diamond” event in Scottsdale.

“We are very grateful to the Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation for this generous grant, which will help our Mobile Health Program...”

Grace Price, MD in Zion National Park with husband Chris.

Nurse Practitioner Elizabeth Knight, DNP, PhD, interviewing Mobile Health patient.
Dear Friends,

I hope this edition of “Healthy Families and Communities” finds you and your family well and enjoying our beautiful Spring weather!

This newsletter highlights many of the reasons I am so proud of our Department of Family and Community Medicine. Our cover story describes our upcoming project to advance and increase access to cancer care for underserved individuals in southern Arizona. I see it as a shining example of our commitment to our department’s four missions: patient care, research, community outreach and education.

I am grateful to the Merck Foundation Alliance to Advance Patient-Centered Cancer Care, for giving our program the opportunity to contribute to this ground-breaking project.

We’re also telling you about two of our many community outreach projects: our work with Special Olympics athletes, to help them be as healthy as they can be, on and off the field; and our work with our local Head Start program to make sure babies and children of low-income families get thorough check-ups and immunizations, along with nutrition advice, so they can get a great “head start” on learning. Springtime is also the time of year when our third-year residents are completing their family medicine training and beginning their practice as fully-trained physicians. I’m sure you will enjoy reading about three of our residency graduates, one of whom will work with the Indian Health Service Hospital in Whiteriver, Arizona; another who is heading out to the San Francisco area for a fellowship in what he considers “the new stethoscope,” and another, who grew up in Boston and will practice full-spectrum family medicine in rural Maine.

As always, best wishes to you and your family,

Myra Muramoto, MD, MPH
Chair, Department of Family and Community Medicine

P.S. We welcome your questions and comments! Please email us at fcm-information@email.arizona.edu or call our main office at (520) 626-7864.