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For Immediate Release

**UI Cancer Center, Governors State University to address cancer disparities in Chicago’s south suburbs**

The University of Illinois Cancer Center and Governors State University have received a joint four-year, $1.5 million grant from the National Cancer Institute to help both institutions conduct community-based research to reduce cancer-related health disparities in Chicago’s south suburbs.

The grant will support the development of an integrated program for GSU junior faculty that provides training to perform independent research and to lend career-development support to minority undergraduate and graduate students at GSU who are interested in health disparities research.

“Governors State University has invested substantially in its basic and health science faculty and programs and is well-positioned to make a dent in bringing down cancer rates locally,” says Dr. Robert Winn, associate vice president for community-based practice at the University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System and director of the UI Cancer Center. “The University of Illinois Cancer Center can help by sharing our expertise in cancer research and delivering community-based cancer prevention and intervention strategies where they are needed most.”

The region has seen a "geographic shift" in the areas with the highest cancer rates, from the city to the suburbs, says Karriem Watson, senior research specialist and administrator for community-engaged research at the UI Cancer Center. “But many suburbs don’t have the infrastructure of robust academic and research cancer centers, or the specialized expertise among their faculty, to address the growing disparities that exist within their local communities,” he said. “That’s what we hope to build with GSU.”

“Partnering with the UI Cancer Center will increase the capacity of GSU to serve as a center of health disparities research in a community that is disproportionately affected by cancer,” said Dr. Rupert Evans, chair and program director of health administration at GSU and co-principal investigator on the grant. “It will also build our faculty’s ability to pursue larger federal grants for projects that will address high cancer rates and mortality in the Southland community.”

GSU, located 37 miles south of Chicago in University Park, Illinois, offers clinical doctoral degrees and master’s programs in social work, nursing, health administration, addiction studies, occupational therapy, physical therapy and communication disorders. Students come from Chicago and its south suburbs, including Homewood, Flossmoor, Matteson, Chicago Heights, Harvey and Calumet City.

“The faculty and students have a very organic relationship with the communities we serve,” said Dr. Catherine Balthazar, chair of the department of communication disorders at GSU and another co-principal investigator on the grant. "Because of the trust we have with the community, we can help bring the opportunity to participate in community-based cancer research and in clinical trials through our partnership with the University of Illinois Cancer Center.”
The grant also supports a breast cancer pilot project led by Dr. Kent Hoskins, associate professor of hematology/oncology in the UIC College of Medicine and member of the UI Cancer Center, and faculty from GSU with expertise in behavioral health and health disparities. The project will test the efficacy of a mobile device app that lets primary care physicians screen women for elevated risk of breast cancer and provides information on genetic counseling. The research team will determine whether use of the app influences women to make recommended follow-up appointments with genetic counselors.

“In the past, people in the Southland have not had access to any type of quality research in helping prevent cancer, especially in minority women,” said GSU's Evans. "That’s one of the focuses of this particular grant -- to work on the disparities that exist in the treatment and access to care in minority women."

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