

UCSD School of Medicine and Helix High School Receive Grant to Increase Interest in Clinical Research

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UCSD has received a \$1.29 million five-year grant from the National Center for Research Resources of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a study designed at increasing minority students' interest and participation in clinical research, clinical trials, and careers in health sciences.

The Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) forms a partnership between the UCSD School of Medicine and Helix Charter High School in San Diego, and establishes a study program which will bring medical professionals into high school classrooms, and students into the hospital and clinics laboratories.

"At the end of the five years we hope to show that, through the help of biomedical professionals from UCSD School of Medicine, we can increase the number of students who would be willing to participate in clinical trials and who would be interested in a biomedical career, specifically people from underrepresented populations," said Gerry Boss, M.D., UCSD professor of medicine and the study's principal investigator.

"One of the most important aspects of this grant is to educate students on the importance of under-represented populations participating in clinical research," said Boss. "An effective method to reach that audience is through students."

To teach the high students about clinical research, a curriculum will be developed and incorporated into the school's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. AVID, an elective course, is a highly successful program that teaches reading, writing, and speaking skills to high school students.

"Beginning with the spring semester 2006, about 50 11 th grade AVID students, will be introduced to various aspects of clinical research" said Boss.

A previous SEPA grant with Helix High School, awarded in 1998, showed that teaching high school students about health topics increases their interest in health-related careers.

The new SEPA program will focus on clinical research and clinical trials. Six UCSD School of Medicine faculty members will write the lessons to integrate clinical research topics into the AVID curriculum.

Topics will include "What is Clinical Research?," "The Ethics of Clinical Research," "Design of Clinical Research Studies," "Participation in Clinical Research," "The Value of Clinical Research," and "Current Clinical Research Projects at UCSD." Each faculty member will prepare several different subjects within each topic, as well as reference materials.

Along with the lectures, students will have a field trip during each year of the program. The field trips will be a visit to the General Clinical Research Center for half the day and the other half at the Clinical Trials Center, both located at UCSD Medical Center, Hillcrest.

Selected students will receive a summer internship and be assigned to the six UCSD faculty members to continue the education process about clinical trials and clinical research. During their senior year, the high school students will each take what they learn to classrooms and teach other students and their families.

"We found in the previous SEPA project that students can be very good teachers, and are very effective at disseminating information, and thus, we built in a peer teaching model in the current project as well." said Dr. Boss.

Along with Boss, there are six UCSD School of Medicine faculty members participating in the program Joel Dimsdale, M.D., psychiatrist; Ravi Mahta, M.D., nephrologist; Renate Pilz, M.D., hematologist-oncologist; Joe Ramsdell, M.D.; director of the UCSD Clinical Trials Center; Doris Trauner, M.D., pediatric neurologist; and Michael Ziegler, M.D.; director of the UCSD General Clinical Research Center.

The two teachers from Helix High School who will be participating are Bart Hays and Lenelle Wylie.

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