

## **Clinical Research Training**

### **NYHQ Wins a State Award for Clinical Research Training**

NYHQ has won an award of \$110,000 to help train a physician in the methods and principles of clinical research.

The award is being made by ECRIP, the Empire Clinical Research Investigator Program. ECRIP is sponsored by the Graduate Medical Education Unit of the NYS Department of Health. The ultimate goal of the program, according to the Commissioner of Health, is to increase the number of clinical researchers in New York State and “to help restore New York as the leader in biomedical research.”

Teaching hospitals are invited to apply for the training award by proposing a clinical research project and a new research position as part of the project. The project must provide instruction in clinical research, such as course work in biostatistics, clinical trial design, grant writing, and research ethics. The researcher must spend at least 35 hours per week in the position and be mentored by a faculty researcher. At NYHQ, special assistance is also provided by the staff of the Lang Research Center.

To qualify for this award, a teaching hospital must meet numerous criteria. Among the areas evaluated are: the clinical research experience of the institution and the mentor, the proposed investigator training, plans for reporting on and disseminating project results, and plans for tracking the career path of the investigator following the training.

The NYHQ project that has won the ECRIP award is titled “Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Intraamniotic Immunity.”

Unsaturated omega-3 fatty acids, especially docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenic acid (EPA) are required for optimal fetal brain development and a diet rich in DHA- and EPA-containing fish has been associated with increased cognitive and perceptual abilities in young children. In addition, diets rich in DHA and EPA have been found in several large studies to be associated with a decreased rate of inflammation leading to preterm birth. Inflammation in the pregnant uterus must be carefully regulated. A too-weak response will be insufficient to deal with the invading bacteria. A too-strong response will result in triggering premature contractions and delivery. Very little is currently known about the mechanisms that regulate these processes.



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The team at NYHQ will test the hypothesis that DHA and EPA limit inflammation in the amniotic cavity, and will attempt to define the mechanisms involved in this careful balancing act within the uterus.

Project director and mentor is Daniel W. Skupski, M.D., F.A.C.O.G. Dr. Skupski is Associate Chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at NYHQ and Associate Director of the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical Center. He is also Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Weill Cornell College of Medicine. He serves on two editorial boards and has been published in peer-reviewed journals.

An experienced researcher, Dr. Skupski will mentor the Clinical Obstetric Research Investigator in four broad areas of knowledge acquisition: biostatistics and study design, clinical experience in the techniques for invasive prenatal diagnosis and knowledge of intrauterine immunity, database management and statistical analysis, acquisition of tissue samples and analysis by PCR (polymerase chain reaction) assay. PCR assay amplifies a piece of DNA and generates copies of a particular DNA sequence for diagnostic and other applications.

The overall goal for the new investigator will be to acquire the clinical research skills necessary to become an independent researcher in the discipline of obstetrics.

