Theresa and Eugene M. Lang
Center for Research and Education

NewYork-Presbyterian/Queens Wins a State Award for Clinical Research Training

NYHQ has won an award of $150,000 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 NYP/Queens, special assistance is also provided by the staff of the Lang Research Center.

To quality 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 NYP/Queens project that has won the ECRIP award is titled "Influence of Lactic Acid Chiral Isomers and Metalloproteinases on Cervical Remodeling and Preterm Parturition."

There is a strong need to improve our understanding of the mechanism(s) responsible for cervical alterations leading to preterm birth and the development of easily applicable protocols that do not require expensive equipment or hospital facilities to identify at risk pregnant women. Our primary objective is to evaluate all subjects from the two groups for cervical length and thinning by ultrasound techniques, which correlate with the risk of preterm birth, and to determine if the findings correlate with the biochemical analyses described below. The ability to substitute a simple biochemical assay for an ultrasound evaluation will make this technology available to all women. The team at NYP/Q will identify women who have had vaginal ultrasound, recruits them to allow a vaginal/cervical sample to be taken, and follow their outcomes (i.e., whether preterm birth occurred or not).

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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 NYP/Queens and Associate Director of the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical Center. He is also 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.

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