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Penn's Annenberg-led Center of Excellence in Cancer Communication Research receives \$7.5 million grant

PHILADELPHIA (DATE) – Recognizing the value of research into the connection between communication and cancer prevention, treatment, and survival, the U.S. National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Institute (NCI) has awarded a five-year, \$7.5 million research grant to the Annenberg School for Communication-led Center of Excellence in Cancer Communication Research (CECCR).

The grant is a renewal of funding from NCI, which first funded Penn's CECCR in 2003. The Penn CECCR is one of only five such research centers in the country. The others are at the University of Michigan, Washington University in Saint Louis, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Kaiser Permanente in Colorado.

"We are excited about the continued funding of the CECCR by the NCI," said Robert Hornik, Ph.D., the Wilbur Schramm Professor of Communication and Director of CECCR. "This will enable us to continue our work and expand our knowledge of how messages from a range of sources in the complex communication environment affect choices related to cancer."

"For five years the University of Pennsylvania has been a leader in the field of cancer communication," said Bradford W. Hesse, Ph.D., Chief, Health Communication and Informatics Research Branch, National Cancer Institute. "Penn's CECCR project has contributed substantively to our understanding of how the public interacts with information about cancer, and has given us insight into how people can and actively look for information about this disease. It also has helped us understand how the public may respond to specific health messages regarding smoking cessation or genetic risk."

Dr. Hesse noted that cancer may take 565,650 lives this year alone, adding that "half of those deaths could be avoided altogether if we could just put into effect what we know about prevention, early detection, and adherence to treatment. Under the leadership of Dr. Hornik, this Center is helping the public and clinical health communities garner the intelligence they need to launch more effective public awareness campaigns toward that end."

The CECCR's accomplishments from its 2003-2008 grant include research about how use of public media sources affects decisions people make about cancer prevention and screening as well as post-diagnosis responses to colon, breast, and prostate cancer; research into how messages in the media about genetic risk affect decisions to engage in or avoid certain behaviors; and determining the effectiveness of anti-smoking advertisements that vary in their message sensation value and argument quality. The CECCR also provided training opportunities to 56 doctoral student and post-doctoral young scholars and also led to 11 additional research grants.

CECCR conducts much of its work within an interdisciplinary environment; five schools within the University of Pennsylvania are involved, to varying degrees, in CECCR research. In addition to Annenberg, they include the School of Medicine, the Wharton School, School of Nursing, and the School of Arts and Sciences.

Research by the CECCR for the next five years reflects this interdisciplinary approach. For example, a longitudinal observational study to explore whether patient-clinician information exchange is associated with differences in cancer patient health behaviors, health care utilization and health outcomes will be led by Professor Hornik from Annenberg and Katrina Armstrong, MD, Division Chief of General Internal Medicine at the School of Medicine. Another project designed to understand how smoking cues within anti-tobacco public service announcements may undermine their effectiveness in motivating treatment-seeking will be led by Joseph N. Cappella, Ph.D., the Gerald R. Miller Professor of Communication at Annenberg, and Caryn Lerman, Ph.D., the Mary Calkins Professor of Psychiatry and Deputy Director of Penn's Abramson Cancer Center, and a Secondary Faculty member at Annenberg. Professor Cappella and Professor J. Sanford Schwartz, MD, of the School of Medicine will co-direct the training core of the CECCR. The Message Design Core led by Dr. Cappella will assist researchers in the selection, design, testing and evaluation of cancer-related messages.

Founded in 1958 through the generosity of and vision of diplomat and philanthropist Walter Annenberg, the Annenberg School for Communication at Penn is devoted to furthering understanding of the role of communication in public life through research, education, and service.

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