

ABSTRACT: 2018 ELAM Institutional Action Project

Project Title: Instituting a Center of Oral Research for Healthy Aging

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Topic Category: Research

Background, Significance of project: With increased life expectancy, individuals over 65 years old will experience a greater frequency of remaining teeth with untreated dental disease and tooth loss. Premature tooth loss, resulting in partial or complete edentulism, is associated with a multitude of systemic comorbid conditions and increased risk of mortality. Thus, sustaining the natural dentition increases wellness, function and overall quality of life. The University of Illinois College of Dentistry is in a unique position to address the oral health of the aging population due to existing clinical and research resources, partnerships in the Chicago area, and the local diverse community it serves. Instituting a Center will increase research opportunity and impact, encourage collaboration and knowledge generation, and ultimately provide the basis for new standards and individualized care.

Purpose/Objectives: I propose to develop a Center of Oral Research for Healthy Aging to address the scientific and clinical knowledge gaps in promoting wellness of the older population by targeting oral health at the forefront of healthy aging. To do so, strategic short- and long-term plans will be developed to establish a scientifically reputable and financially sustainable center.

Methods/Approach/Evaluation Strategy: We utilized a multi-step approach outlining the short- and long-term action plans and a timeline for implementation of the Center. The short-term plans involve: (i) gathering an inventory of the University's programs and resources related to aging; (ii) defining the mission and vision for the Center; (iii) identifying potential stakeholders in basic, translational and clinical research, (iv) identifying readily available and sustainable financial resources; and (v) creating enthusiasm and momentum by bringing together a cohort of clinicians and researchers. The long-term action plans involve: (i) establishing partnerships within campus and local organizations; (ii) securing research funds for self-sustainability and (iii) engaging the local community. The evaluation strategies will include building a database for outcomes and surveys for continuous feedback of stakeholders.

Outcomes/Results: A list of the University's aging programs and stakeholders were identified; with preliminary conversations conducted with campus stakeholders. Communication with similar Centers across the nation are initiated, providing important benchmarks for Center development. An advisory committee reviewed an initial mission and vision statement. A seminar series is planned to begin in late summer to engage research and clinical community. Funds secured for pilot grants to establish inter-disciplinary research groups, including a corporate sponsor gift on Aging Population Research. A wide range of federal funds is available for application for larger projects and future financial sustainability. The success of the Center will include tracking metrics on the numbers of productive collaborative research teams, extramural funds (e.g. grants, philanthropy), scholarly productivity, and the number of community presentations to increase awareness.

Discussion/Conclusion with Statement of Impact/Potential Impact: The Center will serve as a national benchmark for cross-disciplinary sciences supporting groundbreaking research in oral research to promote healthy aging. The Center will become a leading innovator and advocate for oral health in healthy aging.