Development, implementation, and evaluation of a joint research funding mechanism addressing cancer control needs of the state: The Utah Grand Challenges

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BACKGROUND

- A gift from Intermountain to Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) established a partnership to form the “Utah Cancer Outcomes, Outreach and Policy Cooperative” (Utah Cancer CoOp) ($10MM over 5 years)
- Goal of the Utah Cancer CoOp is to improve community health through community-based research initiatives
- The Utah Grand Challenges funding mechanism was initiated by the ELAM fellow (in consultation with a Steering Committee) to form research partnerships between the two organizations and address major cancer challenges of Utah

The Utah Grand Challenges will:
- Give Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI)/University of Utah (UofU) researchers opportunities to eradicate cancer in innovative ways with access to resources beyond our own
- Provide the basis for broader research collaborations between the two organizations
- Result in a favorable view of HCI and UofU by the state legislature and other key stakeholders in Utah, because of demonstrated effort to address cancer in Utah statewide in a collaborative manner
- Foster unique collaborations between HCI and Intermountain to develop community-based research initiatives
- Advance the health, wellness, and/or cancer-related health outcomes of the population through: cancer screening, preventive care, and development of best practice common clinical pathways

GOALS

- To develop and issue a Request for Applications (RFA) for the Utah Grand Challenges
- To implement review of applications, award mechanisms, and evaluation of the processes
- To evaluate the processes associated with the RFA through metrics and surveys
- To review the success of the program by progress of each collaborative research award (in process)
- To develop a business model for year 2 of the Utah Grand Challenges (in process)

All steps were implemented jointly by Dr. Ulrich and her Intermountain partner, Dr. Mark Lewis, Medical Oncology, with guidance by the Huntsman Intermountain Cancer Care Program Steering Committee. A timeline of the implementation steps is presented in Figure 1.

OBJECTIVES & METHODS

1. To develop and issue a Request for Applications (RFA) for the Utah Grand Challenges
2. To implement review of applications, award mechanisms, and evaluation of the processes
3. To evaluate the processes associated with the RFA through metrics and surveys
4. To review the success of the program by progress of each collaborative research award (in process)
5. To develop a business model for year 2 of the Utah Grand Challenges (in process)

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

- The Utah Grand Challenges funding mechanism was successfully implemented, evaluated, and optimized
- The RFA brought together new research teams from the participating organizations that address diverse cancer challenges
- The COVID-19 pandemic has affected both organizations and slowed progress. Drs. Ulrich and Lewis worked with the organizations to address impediments
- Impact of this initiative will continue to be measured and evaluated by the Steering Committee of the Huntsman-Intermountain Cancer Care Program

RESULTS

Table 1. Ongoing Utah Grand Challenge Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>PI(s)</th>
<th>Project Milestone</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Identification of Incidence and Toxicity of Prostate Cancer Overtreatment in Utah</td>
<td>Tward/Barney</td>
<td>Mid-Project Progress Reports Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Cancer Genetic Testing in Families Across Utah: Evaluating Access and Impact on Cancer Prevention</td>
<td>Kohlmann/Sutherland</td>
<td>Year 2 RFA Released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Population-Level Scale Up of Evidence-Based Tobacco Cessation Treatment at Intermountain Healthcare</td>
<td>Wetter/Low</td>
<td>Spring Launch Symposium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️ Exposure and Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicines by Adult Cancer Patients: A Multi-Institutional Study</td>
<td>Johnson/Evans</td>
<td>NOA Jan 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>✔️ Improving Early Detection of Melanoma Recurrence with Circulating Tumor DNA (ctDNA)</td>
<td>Grossmann/Bowles (Pilot)</td>
<td>Review Period Oct-Dec</td>
</tr>
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Milestones of the Utah Grand Challenges are shown in Figure 1.

- 20+ investigators from both organizations attended the “Grand Challenges Speed-Dating Event”
- 8 applications received, reviewed by expert reviewers
- 4 Grand Challenges and 1 Pilot Award awarded ($1MM)
- Project Manager hired to support awardees

- Utah Grand Challenges Symposium” highlighted all projects
- Survey on the RFA process administered
- 2nd RFA ($2MM) modified to address survey responses on process
- 30+ investigators attended the 2nd Grand Challenges Speed-Dating Event