



\$7.5 Million Grant to Support Cancer Education and Research for Native Americans

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The Arizona Cancer Center will collaborate with Northern Arizona University in a major new effort to reduce the disproportionate burden of cancer in Native American peoples of the Southwest.

A five-year, renewable, \$7.5 million cooperative grant from the Minority Institute/Comprehensive Cancer Partnerships (MI/CCP) Division of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) has been awarded jointly to the Arizona Cancer Center at the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University.

The long-term goal of the Comprehensive NAU/AZCC Cancer Research Partnership is to increase the numbers of Native American health care professionals working in clinical oncology and basic cancer research in Arizona.

UA Professor of biochemistry and public health Louise Canfield and Roger VanAndel, director of comparative medicine at NAU, are co-principal investigators for the project. This unique partnership is designed to draw from the strengths of each institution to accomplish program objectives while forging a sustainable partnership between them.

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As evidenced by national recognition in 2001 for having graduated the most Native American students in the nation, NAU brings a wealth of cultural educational expertise to the project. The Arizona Cancer Center will contribute its nationally recognized research capabilities. This partnership will provide Native American students with state-of-the-art education in cancer research and oncology-related health care professions.

Canfield explains that in the face of decreasing cancer mortality rates in the U.S. population as a whole, cancer mortality in Native Americans actually is increasing.

"We see the successful education of Native American students as necessary to provide the knowledge and understanding required to reverse this trend. The need for more Native American health care workers is critical if we are to implement cancer prevention measures and overcome the reticence among many Native Americans to seek oncology care. This combination of factors tragically results in delayed and ineffective treatment," Canfield says.

"The shortage of Native American health care providers, and particularly those skilled in cancer treatment and research, is critical. Few Native Americans are entering either health care professions or research careers," she adds.

The grant provides an umbrella for several basic research, education and outreach projects. A major research focus will be to investigate the possible linkage of the recent rise in cancer incidence and mortality among Native Americans in the Southwest to the residual effects of uranium mining.

Initial projects include three basic research projects focused on the effects of uranium on cell biology directed by professors Patricia Hoyer, physiology, Clark Lantz, cell biology and anatomy and Emmanuel Akporiaye, microbiology and immunology, and one educational project directed by Lisa Elfring, biochemistry.

"Native American students have a vital interest in the data," says Canfield, "and this interest greatly enhances the potential to recruit and retain students. In the long term, this will increase the number of Native American cancer researchers and oncologists."

Canfield believes in the immediate future these students will be most effective in

communicating the importance of cancer education, research and treatment in their communities. "Having Native American students assume leadership roles in the project greatly enhances the likelihood that communities will participate in and benefit from cancer education and treatment."

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