

NCCAM Awards \$9.5 Million for Acupuncture, TCM Research

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In October, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) announced the first series of grants from three new research center programs as part of its ongoing effort to determine the safety and effectiveness of CAM. More than \$18.6 million in grants were awarded by the NCCAM, with projects as diverse as the establishment as an international center for the study of indigenous phytotherapy, to a study on how antioxidants can slow the aging process.

One of the biggest winners of the NCCAM's latest round of funding is the acupuncture and Oriental medicine profession. Of the 14 grants awarded by NCCAM, eight relate directly to the study of acupuncture, herbal remedies and/or traditional Chinese medicine. Together, the grants total more than \$9.5 million, and will be used to conduct much-needed research into the mechanisms of acupuncture and other components of Asian healing.

"These new centers provide a vehicle for scientists in CAM institutions to partner with established investigators in conventional research institutions to conduct rigorous exploratory and developmental research projects on CAM," remarked Dr. Margaret Chesney, the NCCAM's executive director. She added that the centers are "critical" to the future of CAM research, and that the knowledge culled from these studies will lead to increased acceptance and eventual integration of CAM therapies like acupuncture and herbal remedies into standard patient care.

The NCCAM implemented the new research programs following a review of its original list of complementary and alternative medicine centers, which was established shortly after the NCCAM was created in 1999. In response to the review, NCCAM designed three research programs to help build its next generation of research centers:

- Centers of Excellence for Research on CAM (CERC). CERC grants are given to established research organizations, and are used to investigate the basic principles of the most popular forms complementary and alternative medicine.
- Developmental Centers for Research on CAM (DCRC). This program is designed specifically for CAM institutions, with the purpose of increasing the level and quality of CAM research; promoting research expertise and infrastructure in the complementary and alternative medicine community; and supporting enhanced communication and partnership between CAM and conventional medical research institutions.
- Planning Grants for International Centers for Research on CAM (PICRC). The purpose of the PICRC is to establish partnerships between U.S. and international institutions, and to stimulate an exchange of information and research across cultures.

CERC, DCRC and PICRC Grant Awards

In the CERC program, Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston will receive \$5.9 million over five

years to study the neurobiological effects of acupuncture, with an emphasis on human brain activity. The center will test the hypothesis that acupuncture generates a widespread response in the brain, and that the brain's limbic system plays a central role in this response. A variety of neuroimaging techniques will be employed during the study, including functional MRI (fMRI), along with physiological testing and microarray studies. Researchers will also explore the neural basis of the *de qi* sensation, which is considered essential to clinical efficacy in traditional Chinese acupuncture.

In the DCRC program, The New England School of Acupuncture (NESA) has been designated a developmental CAM research center. Its mission is to bring together leaders from the Oriental medicine and conventional medicine communities to critically evaluate the efficacy and safety of acupuncture, and to develop sound methodologies for acupuncture research. The center will strengthen and build upon ongoing collaborations between NESA, the Osher Institute at Harvard Medical School, and two HMS-affiliated institutions: the Dana Farber Cancer Institute and Children's Hospital Boston.

Using the resources of all four institutions, the center will support three exploratory studies, including one that will try to assess the reliability of a method for reaching traditional Oriental medical diagnoses in the context of clinical trials. This study will also explore issues related to individualized acupuncture treatments in the context of clinical trials, appropriate controls for clinical acupuncture trials, and the development of outcome measures consistent with traditional Oriental medicine philosophy. Other studies will assess the benefits of acupuncture as an adjunct therapy in the treatment of chronic pain in young women with endometriosis, and in the treatment of women with ovarian cancer who are receiving chemotherapy. The DCRC grant runs three years, and will total approximately \$2 million.

In the PICRC program, two-year grants related to traditional Chinese medicine have been awarded to six groups:

Under the guidance of Leanna Standish, ND, PhD, LAc, Bastyr University will collaborate with scientists and practitioners in India to develop an international center for CAM research on ayurvedic medicine. The grant used to establish the center is approximately \$284,000.

Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City will receive more than \$270,000 to work with scientists in China. Its mission is to establish a center for traditional Chinese medicine and women's health at Fudan University in China, which will specialize in the treatment of conditions such as menstruation, fertility, pregnancy and menopause.

Harvard University Medical School will join forces with the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Keio University in Japan, and will use its \$263,000 grant to establish the U.S.-China-Japan Research Consortium on Herbal Medicine.

The University of Maryland, along with the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Illinois at Chicago Program for Collaborative Research in the Pharmaceutical Sciences, will work together to create the Center for Functional Bowel Disorders and Traditional Chinese Medicine. The university will receive approximately \$255,000.

In Chapel Hill, NC, researchers at the University of North Carolina will work in collaboration with Kyung Hee University in South Korea to establish the Korean Acupuncture in Central Nervous System Disorders Center. A grant of more than \$254,000 will be used to study the use of Korean acupuncture

and its effects on the central nervous system.

The University of Washington in Seattle, in conjunction with Ewha Woman's University, Won Kwang University and Koryo Hand Therapy Clinic in Seoul, South Korea, will establish the Center for Woman's Health Complementary and Alternative Therapies Research. The total award for the project is approximately \$272,000.

With regard to the PICRC program, Dr. John Killen, Jr., director of NCCAM's Office of International Health Research, commented, "It is our hope that this initiative will encourage research in traditional medicine and result in research that benefits the health of citizens in many countries. We know that 80 percent of the world's population uses plants to meet their primary health care needs, so research on indigenous practices can lead to significant advances in global health."

Millions of Americans use CAM therapies such as acupuncture and herbal medicine each year, but the repository of research in the United States that validates these therapies has yet to be fully established. Through its new research programs and collaborative efforts with other organizations, the NCCAM will ensure that the highest level of scientific scrutiny is brought to bear on these forms of healing. The results of this research will help to prove what hundreds of millions of people outside the U.S. already know: that acupuncture and herbal medicine are complex yet cost-effective forms of care that can treat a wealth of conditions safely and effectively, without the side effects associated with drugs or other medications.

References

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3. NCCAM awards planning grants for international centers for research. Eurekalert press release, Oct. 29, 2003.
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