Huntsman Cancer Institute Study to Look at Reducing Disparities in Native American Cancer Care

$3.9M Federal project will focus on eleven Native American tribal locations throughout Utah; three in north central Montana

March 28, 2006, Salt Lake City—The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has selected Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) at the University of Utah as one of six sites for demonstration projects to improve the early detection and treatment of cancer and reduce health disparities among minority Medicare beneficiaries. The HCI project will focus on Native Americans living in eleven tribal locations throughout Utah and three tribal locations in north central Montana.

Randall Burt, M.D., HCI interim executive director and principal investigator on the $3.9 million project, explains that HCI’s geographic location was a persuasive factor in getting the project.

“Not only do we have several Native American populations within the Intermountain West that we can enroll, but many of them live in what is termed a ‘frontier’ area, where there may be six or fewer people per square mile,” he says. “This geographical remoteness adds an additional layer of difficulty to people already having problems accessing health care.”
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“The HCI project will look at a number of ways Native Americans on Medicare who are living in rural and frontier areas can get the appropriate cancer screening for breast, cervical, colorectal, and prostate cancer,” adds Randall Rupper, M.D., M.P.H., an investigator at HCI and the VA Salt Lake Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center who is co-principal investigator on the project. “If they have cancer, we’ll navigate them through any barriers to treatment, whether it’s help with transportation, translation and interpretation services, or care coordination, so they can receive the most beneficial therapies.”

According to CMS, a total of 13,000 members of minority populations now on Medicare will be enrolled between the six demonstration sites. The HCI demonstration project goal is to enroll 1,800 Native Americans from the Utah and Montana locations. The Sletten Cancer Institute at Benefis Healthcare in Great Falls, Montana is part of the HCI project and will assist with recruitment of Native Americans in Montana.

The five other demonstration sites and the minority groups to be enrolled include Molokai General Hospital (Asian American and Pacific Islander); University of Texas (Hispanic-Mexican American); New Jersey Medical School (Hispanic-Puerto Rican); Johns Hopkins University (African American) and Josephine Ford Cancer Center (African American).

A copy of the CMS press release is available at