

The Dartmouth Institute



DARTMOUTH INSTITUTE RECEIVES \$2 MILLION TO STUDY USE OF DECISION AIDS IN BREAST CANCER TREATMENT

A RESEARCH TEAM AT THE DARTMOUTH INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH POLICY AND CLINICAL PRACTICE HAS RECEIVED A \$2 MILLION FUNDING AWARD from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to conduct a research project that is likely to change the way women and their doctors make decisions about breast cancer surgery. Led by Assistant Professor Marie-Anne Durand, PhD, the project will compare care that incorporates the use of two effective decision aids—an Option Grid™ and a Picture Option Grid™—with usual care received by women newly diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer (stages I to IIIA).

One in eight women will develop breast cancer. The diagnosis is traumatic and life-altering, and information about treatment options can be overwhelming and confusing, particularly for women of lower socio-economic status (SES) or health literacy.

“We believe that by using new tools like Option Grid decision aids women will be able to get better information, have more productive conversations with their doctors, and ultimately will be better able to choose the surgery and treatment option that’s right for them,” said Durand.

The multi-site, three-year study will include 1,000 patients recruited from four large cancer centers, including the Norris Cotton Cancer Center at Dartmouth-Hitchcock. The researchers hope to show that women who are able to use decision aids during the course of their care are more meaningfully involved (with their physicians) in creating a treatment plan for themselves, have lower anxiety, less decision regret, and a higher quality of life than women who receive the usual care (that typically doesn’t integrate decision aids).

PAIGE STEIN



HOWELL RECEIVES VETERANS AFFAIRS ICARE AWARD

ALEXANDRA HOWELL, PHD, A RESEARCH BIOLOGIST AT THE VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER (VAMC) in White River Junction, VT, and a professor of medicine and of microbiology/immunology at Geisel, has received the VISN 1 Network Director’s ICARE award from the VA New England Healthcare System. The award recognizes outstanding contributions from employees who best demonstrate the VA’s core values of: integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence (ICARE).

The award recognized Howell for her “innovative, nationally recognized research in HIV/AIDS, bringing together clinical and bench researchers, mentoring many students and junior scientists, and building an active and consistently well-funded research program at the White River Junction VAMC.”

Working with colleagues at Geisel, Howell is developing a novel therapeutic approach—utilizing a technique known as CRISPR/Cas and delivery tools called lentiviral vectors—to permanently eliminate HIV from infected cells.

“What many people may not realize is that when HIV infects a cell, it inserts its genome into a chromosome and it’s stuck there for the life of the cell,” explains Howell. “All of the drugs that HIV-infected patients take can stop the virus from making copies of itself, but these drugs don’t rid the part of the virus that’s

stuck in the chromosome, which will begin replicating again if the drugs are taken away.”

These anti-HIV drugs can cause liver and kidney toxicity, require patients to be constantly monitored, and are very expensive, says Howell. “Our goal is to establish a reliable delivery process for an RNA molecule and an enzyme—the two components of CRISPR/Cas—that have been shown in the lab to be effective in excising the HIV virus from infected cells, and that also protect healthy cells from becoming infected.”

TIM DEAN