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UF and FSU receive \$29 million to speed discoveries leading to better health

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The University of Florida Clinical and Translational Science Institute, in partnership with Florida State University, has been awarded \$29 million to speed research discoveries that will lead to improved health for people living in the nation's third-largest state.

UF and FSU will expand their research partnership with the five-year award, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health's Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) Program. Led by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, the nationwide network of more than 50 CTSA hubs develop, demonstrate and disseminate advances in translational science, a field devoted to turning research discoveries into new approaches that improve health.

"As an integrated CTSA hub, UF and FSU can bring together our scientific strengths to better serve both of our communities and make a

difference in the lives of all Floridians,” said CTSI Director and CTSA Principal Investigator David R. Nelson, M.D., senior vice president for health affairs at UF and president of UF Health. “By combining complementary resources, we can engage more people as partners in research.”

Nelson leads the CTSI with co-director Betsy A. Shenkman, Ph.D., chair of the UF College of Medicine’s department of health outcomes and biomedical informatics. At FSU, the partnership is led by Jeffrey N. Joyce, Ph.D., senior associate dean for research and graduate programs in the College of Medicine.

“The investment that Florida State University has made in translational research and our expertise in behavioral health interventions is important to the health of our region and the state,” Joyce said. “With the UF-FSU CTSA, we are engaging many of our colleges in the effort to address mental health and health conditions such as HIV, which impact our rural communities and have not received the attention needed.”

In 2009, UF became the state’s first recipient of a CTSA. In 2010, a combination of CTSA and state grant funding allowed the CTSI to team up with the FSU College of Medicine to develop new capabilities for community-based clinical research. This collaboration led to creation of the OneFlorida Clinical Research Consortium in 2013, which includes the University of Miami and affiliated health care partners across the state.

In 2015, UF received a second CTSA and added FSU as a partner to continue developing OneFlorida. To date, the OneFlorida Clinical Research Consortium has facilitated more than 125 projects studying areas as diverse as obesity, cancer, hepatitis C, hypertension and substance use.

Over the next five years, a third cycle of CTSA funding will allow UF and FSU to expand their collaboration, further developing and aligning expertise across the two universities to address complex health challenges in the communities they serve.

“This award and our plans for the next five years have generated excitement nationally and in our community,” said David P. Norton, Ph.D.,

vice president for research at UF. “It is a great time to be doing translational research, and through a decade of continued commitment, UF has become a leader among institutions in this area.”

Added FSU Vice President for Research Gary K. Ostrander: “This is a tremendous opportunity for the FSU faculty who conduct research in a number of different areas that affect public health. Through this partnership with UF, our faculty members will collaborate on a number of different projects in search of innovative solutions for pressing public health issues.”

With CTSA and institutional support, the UF CTSI leads programs that develop new capabilities for research and translation to practice, engages communities in research, offers training programs for research teams, and provides services and resources to facilitate research, such as pilot funding, data tools and specialized facilities.

During its first decade, the UF CTSI launched initiatives and built tools and resources for researchers to use in translating discoveries into practice. The UF CTSI incubated and grew programs in genomic medicine, metabolomics, network analysis, biomedical informatics, community engagement and health communication research. The UF Health Precision Medicine Program launched, putting genomic medicine into practice for patients at UF Health.

The UF Clinical Research Center served as a venue for numerous studies of national significance in diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, gene therapy, rare diseases, pain and liver disease, among other areas. In addition, the UF CTSI transformed UF’s translational science training environment to engage and support a multidisciplinary community of trainees, scholars and mentors across colleges and satellite campuses, and developed a novel program model for training doctoral students in teams.

In the next five years, UF and FSU will apply and expand these tools, resources and initiatives to improve health and speed research along the translational pathway. For example, the two institutions will deepen engagement with policy stakeholders, rural communities and UF/ IFAS

extension offices in all 67 counties in Florida.

CTSI funding through the UF partnership helped FSU establish a Network for Clinical Research and Training, leading to new studies in Tallahassee and Orlando, where the FSU College of Medicine has regional campuses.

Over the last several years, FSU has invested in research centers and faculty conducting translational research in mental health, substance abuse, risky behaviors and health conditions that have the potential to be treated with behavioral interventions. The research centers involve more than 100 investigators spanning several FSU departments and colleges, including medicine, human sciences, nursing, social work, social science and public policy, communication and information and psychology.

As the partnership with the UF CTSI enters its next phase, FSU will continue to build on its investment in translational research centers; focus on patient-centered health care responsive to community needs — particularly involving underserved, minority, rural and elderly populations; and bring diverse expertise to translational research in areas identified by the CTSI as presenting the greatest health needs.