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Center for Behavioral Research: Individual Interventions for Breast Cancer Patients

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I. Introduction

This is an annual report for the Center for Biobehavioral Research in Breast Cancer, a center of excellence that was initially funded in September, 2001. The Center was designed to support, stimulate, conduct, and disseminate research and research reports on the biological and behavioral interactions characterizing the development and progression of breast cancer as well as treatment and survivor effects. Behavioral variables, particularly those directly related to activity in biological regulatory systems and defense systems, appear to be key determinants of participation in early detection and prevention programs, effective use of chemoprevention agents, and in patient adjustment, caregiving, and quality of life. This multidisciplinary Center is devoted to the investigation of biobehavioral pathways underlying breast cancer prevention and control, including development of research and training, involving participation by behavioral scientists, oncologists, nurses, social workers, psychiatrists, immunologists, and molecular biologists. These activities are directed towards organization, stimulation, and facilitation of integrated biobehavioral research aimed at prevention and control of breast cancer. The Center has assembled an interacting group of behavioral, biological, and medical scientists to foster new collaborations and extend existing ones in the context of training and education about breast cancer. These training opportunities, free exchange of ideas, and regular interaction will supplement and connect research activity on proposed projects as well as research cores that support this research. Integration of theory, cross-cutting research themes, and multidisciplinary training has begun to produce novel ways of thinking about breast cancer research and innovative, patient-focused research activity.

II. Body

This section summarizes research accomplishments associated with our approved statement of work. Under normal circumstances, research findings would be presented and discussed and relevant publications would be appended. However, this is complicated by the fact that this is a Center project with numerous objectives among cores and research projects, and that funding for major parts of the Center's activity have not yet been released for our use due to continuing delays in obtaining IRB approval and human subjects reviews by the granting agency. We have secured approval by the University of Pittsburgh IRB twice since this project was proposed. It has been reviewed scientifically by the peer review panel and by the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute Protocol Review Committee. All of these approvals were obtained in a timely fashion. Delays in final approval
by the granting agency have made it impossible to begin research on
the two Center projects and have curtailed overall Center activity, as
the planned research constitutes a major component of Center life.
Nonetheless, some Center activities have begun and preparations for
the research projects have been completed so that when final
approvals are forthcoming the Center can immediately operate at full
strength.

The statement of work for the administrative core of the Center
includes orientation to the goals of the Center (introduction with faculty
and medical staff who will be involved, delineation of education and
training, objectives, establishment of committees, derivation of a
calendar of events including monthly seminars, offering opportunities
to trainees for involvement in Center activities), solicitation of
applications for training positions and competitive review of these
applications, attendance at monthly seminars, and attendance in
activities of the Comprehensive Breast Center clinical conferences.
These activities have been initiated and for the most part have been
accomplished to the extent possible due to the delays noted above.
Orientation activities have been completed and activities such as
monthly seminars and bi-weekly research conferences have been
conducted over the past 10 months. A calendar of events was not
developed but rather our events have been integrated into a single
calendar of events used in the local (Pittsburgh) behavioral medicine
community by way of a list serve that supports faculty and others at the
University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie-Mellon University, and the UPMC
Health System.

Requests for training applications were made and a number of
outstanding pre- and post-doctoral applications were competitively
reviewed. Two pre-doctoral trainees were selected from among the 26
reviewed in the Health Psychology and Clinical Psychology programs
at the University of Pittsburgh. One, Tamara Somers, is interested in
anxiety and patient adjustment to having breast cancer and the other,
Amanda Midboe is interested in psychological trauma and
neuropsychological sequelae of breast cancer chemoprevention.
Several outstanding applications (12) for post-doctoral training were
also received and three applicants were accepted after competitive
review. One, Heidi Hamann, is interested in genetic testing for breast
cancer risk and will participate in development of research in that area.
A second, Dana Busch, is interested in cancer prevention and smoking
cessation and has already developed a promising project for piloting
an in-patient smoking cessation intervention. The third, Elizabeth
Mundy, is interested in psychological trauma and will participate in
ongoing work in that area. In addition, Center members have attended
seminars and research meetings as well as clinical conferences when relevant.

The only task that has not been completed is a website summarizing scientific findings and training opportunities in the Center. Because of continuing delays in initiation of research activities, this has been postponed until year 02.

III. Key Research Accomplishments
None (see above)

IV. Reportable outcomes
None (see above)

V. Conclusions

The activities of the Center have been sharply curtailed by delays in final human subjects review and in release of funds for the research core and projects in the Center. Training, development of content for seminars and research meetings, and conduct of the research have been affected and produced suboptimal conditions for development of the Center. Consequently, our accomplishments for the first year are not what had been anticipated and the relative lack of activity is reflected in the length of this report. Nonetheless, all objectives and tasks that could be completed have been save one, and most of the support from year 01 has been conserved so that activities can increase immediately once approvals and release of funds are achieved. We have been successful in meeting training objectives and establishing the basic core of the Center.