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HEALTH CARE

RIH awarded \$11M for stem-cell research

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PROVIDENCE – Rhode Island Hospital will receive \$11 million over the next five years to create a major stem-cell research center that will focus on stem-cell biology and tissue-regeneration techniques that could be used to treat marrow and lung diseases.



LIFESPAN CORP.

The grant was awarded through the Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE), a National Institutes of Health program. COBRE has also funded a major cancer research center at Rhode Island Hospital and other centers at Brown University, Women & Infants Hospital and Roger Williams Medical Center.

PETER QUESENBERRY, of Rhode Island Hospital and Brown's Alpert Medical School, will lead a new, federally-funded research center as it explores stem-cell biology and potential treatments.

The COBRE in stem-cell research will be situated alongside other major research labs in a new, 10,000-square-foot lab in Lifespan Corp.'s Coro Building in Providence.

The center will be led by Dr. Peter Quesenberry, director of hematology and oncology at Rhode Island Hospital and Brown University's Warren Alpert Medical School, and a physician with Providence-based University Medicine Foundation Inc.

Quesenberry and his colleagues will initially focus on determining the true phenotype – or the observable characteristics – of marrow stem cells; how that information is transmitted; and how the stem cells differentiate and become specific kinds of tissue.

The long-term goal, the hospital said, is to translate that basic-science research into clinical trials on tissue restoration or correction in patients with chronic obstructive lung disease and malignant blood diseases.

"The beauty of the COBRE grant is [that] not only will it allow us to develop a stem cell research center at Rhode Island Hospital, but it will also help us to assemble a group of outstanding, talented investigators who excel in these areas," Quesenberry said in a news release.

"Those investigators can then serve as mentors to young, up-and-coming researchers," he added, "who we can recruit and then retain right here at this research center."

The research team will include three investigators, mentored by experienced scientists, in three specific studies, with the potential to add more, Quesenberry said.

"A grant of this magnitude is especially welcome during these difficult economic times and is a definite boon for the research sector of our state," said Peter

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Snyder, vice president of research for Lifespan, the hospital's parent company.

"Dr. Quesenberry is already a renowned scientist, and this grant will undoubtedly result in breakthroughs that will have a direct impact on the care of patients who will benefit from advances in tissue restoration," Snyder said. "I know we all look forward to that day."

Members of the state's congressional delegation had supported the grant application, and U.S. Sen. Jack Reed and U.S. Rep. James Langevin, both Rhode Island Democrats, celebrated the hospital's accomplishment in the news release.

"Rhode Island Hospital is nationally renowned for pioneering efforts in stem cell-research," Reed said. "This federal award will allow the hospital to expand and enhance existing research initiatives and help attract more talented researchers and promising young scientists to the state."

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