

PERSONALIZED MEDICINE

GUILFORD INITIATIVE GEARS UP WITH \$2.2M DOD FUNDING

The promise of personalized medicine has been long heralded, to be sure, but a program in central North Carolina is taking steps to transform the talk into clinical reality.

The Guilford Genomic Medicine Initiative is a collaborative effort bringing together about 30 people at three partner institutions: the Moses Cone Health System, the Duke University Center for Human Genetics, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. "We're really working as a partnership," says **Vincent Henrich**, director of the Institute for Health, Science and Society at UNC Greensboro. "There's a lot of communication going on, and I think that's been essential for us in terms of making this really move forward."

Also moving the project forward is funding from the latest defense appropriations bill to the tune of \$2.2 million dollars. Three years ago, the project kicked off with initial defense funding of \$3.4 million.

It was a confluence of ideas that sparked the GGMI about six years ago, recalls **Margaret Pericak-Vance**, director of the Duke University Center for Human Genetics. It was then that Pericak-Vance and her husband, **Jeffery Vance** — a neurologist, medical geneticist, and associate director of the center — started talking about setting up a model to incorporate the latest findings in genomics with clinical care. Around that time, **Patricia Sullivan**, chancellor at UNC Greensboro and Pericak-Vance's old biology prof, was setting up the state's first and only

genetic counseling graduate program. Pericak-Vance saw the synergy at once and signed Sullivan on to the project. As she tells it, "[UNC Greensboro] has the genetic counseling school, the excellent education, and we have the informatics and genomics background. We're both interested in personalized or genomic medicine, so the idea was to take all of our expertise and put them together."

Henrich leads the project's educational core, which is committed to developing programs designed to teach healthcare workers and members of the community about what it means to bring genomics to the bedside. He says the project's goal is to "educate the physicians, the community, the patients about genomic medicine to the point where they feel comfortable and informed enough to have a dialogue."

Another component, Henrich says, is "working with the community health system, which we're doing* with the Moses Cone Healthcare Center." That center provides primary clinical sites and administers the program's DOD funding and subcontracting to partner institutions.

Although the program is initially looking at genetic risk factors associated with thrombosis as well as breast and ovarian cancers, Pericak-Vance stresses that "the diseases themselves are instruments for us to see how to develop a model" for clinical practice. One of the applications for the GGMI model will be the US military healthcare system, says Henrich. —*Jen Crebs*



Guilford Genomics crew, from left: Vincent Henrich of UNCG, Pamela Lietz of MCHC, Jeffery Vance and Margaret Pericak-Vance of DUCHG

The **University of Toronto's** Canadian Program on Genomics and Global Health released a report calling for leaders at this summer's G8 summit to establish a global network to help resolve potential conflicts between bioterrorism control and biotechnology development.

George Mason University teamed up with the **Instituto Superiore di Sanità** in Rome to develop a proteomics research program to discover new drug targets and biomarkers for early cancer detection. **Lance Liotta** and **Emanuel Petricoin** will lead the research through George Mason's Center for Applied Proteomics and Molecular Medicine.

Thomas Williams is the new chief science officer and vice president for R&D at **Exagen**, where he was previously a special advisor for molecular pathology. He is a part-time professor of pathology at the **University of New Mexico**.

NIH awarded a phase I SBIR grant to **Protein Discovery** to develop a fractionation system that prepares human serum for high-throughput mass-spectrometry analysis.

Compugen will lead an international consortium developing a platform to simulate the MAP-kinase pathway. The consortium is funded by the **European Commission** to the tune of €3.1 million over three years.