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Northwestern - \$3.4 Million in Federal Research Grants in 2001

By Editorial Staff

BLOOMINGTON, Minnesota - The National Institute of Health's (NIH) recent award of a \$1.5-million research grant to Northwestern Health Sciences University brought the school's total federal funding for health care research projects to more than \$3.4 million in 2001.

The \$1.5 million NIH grant is for a five-year study on acute neck pain, the largest research study in the history of Northwestern. The study will be conducted by Northwestern's Wolfe-Harris Center for Clinical Studies.

The funding from the NIH follows on the heels of two separate studies funded for nearly \$1 million each by the United States Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which focus on chronic neck pain and chronic low back pain. HRSA, which is part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, awarded the Center \$963,432 for a three-year study on chronic low back pain and \$959,432 for a three-year study on chronic neck pain earlier this year.

Gert Bronfort, DC, PhD, a professor at Northwestern, is the principal investigator for the two HRSA studies and the NIH study. Roni Evans, DC, MS, an associate professor at Northwestern, is the co-investigator for the three projects.

Northwestern's success in securing federal research dollars, according to Dr. Bronfort, stems from the university's long-term support of infrastructure; an extensive body of good research previously completed; long-standing collaborative relationships with established medical researchers; collaboration with the NIH-funded research center at Palmer Chiropractic University; and the researchers, clinicians and support staff at Northwestern.

"Our research team's ability to ask research questions that truly address the gaps in scientific literature to the satisfaction of NIH reviewers in the area of conservative management of neck and back pain is an important

reason for our success," explained Dr. Bronfort. He also noted that the careful planning of pilot studies, which establish the feasibility of full-scale randomized trials, have helped establish the university's credibility.

Christine Goertz,DC,PhD, a health science administrator at the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health, has a different take on Northwestern's success in federal research funding. "Dr. Bronfort is one heck of a grant writer," she emphasized. "Northwestern is establishing itself nationally as a leader in randomized clinical trials for chiropractic research."

Volunteers in the HRSA and NIH studies will be treated at Northwestern's Wolfe-Harris Center for Clinical Studies. The NIH-funded study will begin recruiting the 300 volunteers needed for the project early this year. The research award from the NIH for the acute neck pain study follows the center's completion of a smaller \$60,000 pilot study funded by the NIH on acute neck pain, which was completed in 2000. The \$1.5 million acute neck pain study hopes to determine the relative effectiveness of chiropractic spinal manipulation, prescription medication, and self-care advice for neck pain in both the short term (after six weeks) and long term (after one year).

Northwestern has garnered more than \$5 million in research grants in the last decade. Studies focused on low back pain; migraine headaches; muscle tension headaches; neck pain; chronic sciatica; carpal tunnel syndrome; hypertension; childhood asthma; chronic otitis media; rural care; and infantile colic.

"We have developed an international reputation for conducting conservative health care research of the highest quality," said Charles Sawyer,DC, who directs Northwestern's research program. "That reputation is instrumental in procuring research funding from federal granting organizations. Recent studies by Northwestern on chronic neck pain, muscle tension headaches and low back pain have all received high ratings from nationally-known research reviews."

While the three research studies will primarily be conducted at Northwestern, they will also involve collaboration with doctors and scientists in the Twin Cities, Canada, and Denmark. All three studies involve doctors from the Berman Center for Outcomes and Clinical Research, operated by the Minneapolis Medical Research Foundation; the University of Minnesota; and the Pain Assessment and Rehabilitation Center, all located in the Twin Cities. The NIH study also includes consulting faculty from McMaster University in Canada, and the University of Odense in Denmark.

The three-year HRSA studies involve a combined 575 volunteers. Northwestern researchers expect to screen as many as 1,800 people for each study.



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