Tulane University awarded $11.4M to turn discoveries into cures

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The National Institutes of Health has awarded Tulane University an $11.4 million grant to develop more scientists devoted to clinical research aimed at helping patients suffering from high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and related conditions.

The five-year grant will launch the Tulane University Translational Sciences Institute (TUTSI), which will translate pre-clinical research in chronic diseases from "lab to bedside" and from "bedside to the community" to improve patient care and population health.

The program aims to establish an internationally recognized research initiative focused on preventing and treating cardiometabolic diseases, including obesity, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and other chronic conditions.

The grant is an Institutional Development Award (IDeA) Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE), which is an NIH program that helps universities in under-resourced states build research capacity. COBREs provide junior faculty with research funding, career development opportunities and strong mentoring from senior investigators. The goal is to fuel their research to the point where they can successfully earn NIH grants, become independent investigators and graduate from the program to make room for others who can repeat the cycle.

Since 2002, Tulane has received more than $58 million in research support from the program for COBREs in hypertension, cancer genetics and aging and regenerative medicine. The new institute will be Tulane's first COBRE solely focused on clinical and translational research.

"Translational research means you're working with people," said TUTSI co-director Dr. Lee Hamm, senior vice president and dean of Tulane University School of Medicine. "Translational research aims to transform bench science discoveries into clinical research to develop new methods for diagnosing, treating and preventing diseases and to implement new knowledge into everyday clinical and public health practice to improve the health of populations."

The first class of investigators to join the Institute includes:

• Dr. Shengxu Li, assistant professor of epidemiology, who will study how obesity during childhood predicts risks for diabetes;
• Katherine Mills, assistant professors of epidemiology, who will investigate how dietary salt consumption affects a key marker of kidney damage in patients with chronic kidney disease;
• Hui Shen, assistant professor of biostatistics, who will study how gut bacteria affects risks for osteoporosis.