The Institute to Enhance Palliative Care Receives $300,000 in Support from The Heinz Endowments for Post-Graduate Medical Fellowship in Palliative Care

The University of Pittsburgh’s Palliative Care Fellowship Program, which prepares medical professionals for careers in palliative medicine, will operate under a new name and be supported through a three-year, $300,000 grant from The Heinz Endowments to the Institute to Enhance Palliative Care. As one of only nine accredited programs in the country that combines patient care experience with rigorous training in clinical research, the fellowship stresses communication, ethical and legal decision-making skills, as well as bereavement support and interdisciplinary team work associated with patient care. Its research component sets Pittsburgh’s program apart from most other palliative care fellowships in the United States, and positions its graduates for leadership positions in this growing field.

The Heinz Endowments’ grant, under which the fellowship will be named in honor of the late Senator H. John Heinz III, will provide vital bridge funding during the period leading up to official recognition of palliative medicine as a medical subspecialty. That designation will make the fellowship eligible for federal funding through the Medicare program. “It is impressive that Pittsburgh is ahead of much of the rest of the country in developing palliative care training and promoting it as a specialty,” Howard Heinz Endowment Chairman, Teresa Heinz, said in announcing the grant. “We wanted to support the groundbreaking work with funding, but I personally wanted to support its mission through my late husband’s name, since so much of his work in government was about supporting families through better medical care.”

The palliative care program is especially close, she said, to John Heinz’s authoring legislation that provides for hospice services under Medicare. “The medical profession now recognizes the urgent need to address the palliative care needs of our rapidly aging population, and medical educators are racing to keep up,” said David Barnard, Ph.D., professor of medicine and director of the Institute to Enhance Palliative Care.

Paige Hepple joined the Institute team this summer as project coordinator. At the Institute she is focusing on project management, communications, proposal writing and development for the Institute and for the Coalition for Quality at the End of Life (CQEL), a consortium of the leading health care providers, insurance companies, professional organizations, and community groups in the Greater Pittsburgh region. Projects include advance care planning, community education, end-of-life care needs assessment, and initiatives to strengthen community-based research capabilities of palliative care researchers at the University. Ms. Hepple earned her BS in professional writing with additional concentration in nonprofit management from Slippery Rock University. Previously, she did writing, research, and project work for Pittsburgh-based nonprofit consulting firm Dewey & Kaye.

The Institute to Enhance Palliative Care’s website has been improved and updated. It continues to be housed within the domain of the University of Pittsburgh’s Division of General Internal Medicine. Please visit http://www.dgim.pitt.edu/iepc/index.asp to learn more about the Institute and all of the important things happening in palliative care at the University of Pittsburgh.