

New HIV/AIDS registry to help answer key questions

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A new community-based HIV/AIDS registry, one of the first in the nation to include patients from rural areas, will provide a unique opportunity to find answers to myriad medical questions, from the impact of drugs such as marijuana on the virus to why some patients naturally ward off the disease.

The registry is being created by a Michigan State University infectious disease team led by Peter Gulick, an associate professor in the College of Osteopathic Medicine studying HIV for decades and operating three clinics with more than 700 patients.

"Despite some notable successes in recent years, there still is a critical need to address the multiple problems that afflict all HIV infected populations," Gulick said. "While there are many HIV registries across the nation, almost all are university-based in urban settings, providing [patient information](#) that is not always diverse or representative, which can limit progress."

Research of [HIV patients](#) in rural areas is lacking, said Linda Dale, also with the college and a member of Gulick's team. Additionally, there is a need to study the use of drugs such as marijuana in patients in various settings.

The new registry will draw patients from Gulick's clinic in mid-Michigan, as well as clinics in the Saginaw area and northern lower Michigan. Patient consents are being accumulated and a database soon

will be finalized.

"The registry will help us identify groups of HIV patients that have specific characteristics, which allows researchers to investigate populations of patients not previously adequately studied," Dale said.

It will capture not only [biological data](#) from patients but socio-economic characteristics, too, creating an epidemiological [treasure trove](#) for researchers. Already, several MSU researchers have expressed interest in setting up projects:

*Norbert Kaminski, professor of pharmacology and toxicology and director of the Center for Integrative Toxicology, will be investigating the impact of drugs, specifically marijuana-related cannabinoids, on HIV-infected white blood cells. A large number of HIV patients, between 25-50 percent, use marijuana to stimulate their appetite. However, the effect on the [immune system](#) is unclear. Many patients in the registry have confirmed evidence of drug use, including marijuana.

*Andrea Amalfitano with the College of Osteopathic Medicine seeks to analyze genetic factors that may influence why some patients never see a good restoration of their immune system cells. Finding the connection could prove useful in developing new drugs.

*Sung Jin Kim and Jeannine Scott from microbiology and molecular genetics are interested in looking at the function of natural killer cells, which are found in the immune system and crucial in fighting off viral infections in the body.

"Using all resources the university offers, we plan to develop an HIV-focused clinical, behavioral and basic discovery research program which translates into the improved health of [patients](#)," Gulick said. "This is the heart of clinical translational research."

The team is working with Nicole Jones of MSU's Biomedical Research Informatics Core to set up the data collection and storage of information. All patient data is de-identified and confidential.

Funding for setting up the registry came from the colleges of Osteopathic Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, with the support of deans William Strampel and Christopher Brown, respectively.

Provided by Michigan State University

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