Tulane University joins CDC's study of COVID-19 transmission

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Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine will partner with local healthcare providers to launch a COVID-19 study of patients and medical workers in New Orleans as part of a larger Centers for Disease Control effort to answer key epidemiological and clinical questions about the disease.

"We are so pleased that New Orleans will be one of metropolitan areas participating in this important population-based study. The data should provide unique information about the epidemiology of COVID-19 in our community and how it changes over the next year," said local principal investigator Dr. Richard Oberhelman, professor of tropical medicine and associate dean for global health at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. "We are grateful to our team of collaborators in New Orleans, at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, and at Vysnova Partners Inc. for their commitment to the project, and to Senator Bill Cassidy and Congressman Steve Scalise for their enthusiastic support."

The local portion of the study will be done in partnership with several area health systems, including Tulane University Medical Group, DePaul Community Health Centers and Children's Hospital New Orleans, in addition to a randomly selected population from the New Orleans region.

The research is part of a recently announced $54 million, two-year CDC contract with Vysnova Partners Inc., in association with Wake Forest Baptist Health and other health systems and corporations. The goal is to coordinate research on the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Using health records, patient survey data and antibody testing, the study will provide urgently needed estimates of how many people in a given area have COVID-19 and overall infection rates over time. It will also examine geographic, demographic and clinical trends. This type of data is important for policymakers making decisions on reopening the state's economy.

Over the course of the study, participants will report daily exposures, risk-reduction behaviors and respiratory disease symptoms through a secure app on their smartphone, tablet or computer. In addition, a systematic sample of participants will receive at-home test kits to identify levels of COVID-19 antibodies. Electronic health record data will be accessed to complement participant self-reported data. Additionally, the effectiveness of some personal protective equipment will be analyzed among health care workers.

"Our team hopes to develop a more complete understanding of the disease by determining the frequency of infection, learning how it is transmitted and pinpointing who gets infected to help plan public health interventions," said Carlos Rivera, CEO and president of Vysnova Partners Inc., a leading program management firm located in Landover, Maryland.

Wake Forest Baptist Health, based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, will serve as the lead investigative institution for the study, responsible for scientific oversight and direction. The George Washington University's Biostatistics Center will serve as the data-coordinating center to analyze the information collected.

The other institutions participating in the study are Atrium Health, MedStar Health, the University of Maryland Medical System, University of Mississippi Medical Center, Oracle Corp., Neoteryx, Scanwell Health, Javara Inc., LabCorp and United Parcel Service.