



\$1.5 million grant will be used to improve heart health of African-Americans in Indiana

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Mohan J. Dutta, a Purdue professor of health communication, received a \$1.5 million grant to reduce the incidence of heart disease in the high-risk African-American population in Indiana. Dutta and his team will collaborate with the Indiana Minority Health Coalition and its affiliates in Lake and Marion counties during the three-year project, which is funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The research team will create a technology hub that will allow partners and patients to post information, collaborate online, offer feedback and build technology-based

community infrastructures. This health disparities hub will utilize HUBzero, a Web portal environment developed at Purdue. (Purdue University photo/Andrew Hancock)

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WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - Reducing the incidence of heart disease in the high-risk African-American population in Indiana is the aim of a new \$1.5 million grant at Purdue University.

"Heart disease not only can lead to premature death but also affect the quality of life for many individuals," said [Mohan J. Dutta \(http://cla.purdue.edu/communication/People/index.cfm?p=Mohan_Dutta\)](http://cla.purdue.edu/communication/People/index.cfm?p=Mohan_Dutta), professor of health communication and director of the project.

"Unfortunately, improvements in disease prevention are small, and this project, which will emphasize a community-driven, culture-centered approach, really positions us to bring about a paradigm shift to improve the effectiveness of public health programs. Doing so could help us address the high health disparities experienced by African-Americans by creating participatory spaces for African-American communities to voice their opinions about health issues."

Dutta and his team will collaborate with the [Indiana Minority Health Coalition \(http://www.imhc.org/\)](http://www.imhc.org/) and its affiliates in Lake and Marion counties during the three-year project,

which is funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The research team will create a technology hub that will allow partners and patients to post information, collaborate online, offer feedback and build technology-based community infrastructures. This health disparities hub will utilize HUBzero, a Web portal environment developed at Purdue.

Co-principal investigator William "Bart" Collins, clinical associate professor and director of health-care communications at Purdue's Regenstrief Center, will be the coordinator for this aspect of the project. The research group also is composed of a second co-principal investigator, Titilayo A. Okoror, an assistant professor of health and kinesiology, and team members Gary L. Kreps, the Eileen and Steve Mandell Endowed Chair in Health Communication and director of the Center for Health and Risk Communication at George Mason University; Stephen C. Hines, vice president for research at the Health Research and Educational Trust in Chicago; and Calvin E. Roberson Jr., vice president of planning and program development at the Indiana Minority Health Coalition.

The project will focus on heart disease, specifically modifying how the information is outlined in the well-known Comparative Effectiveness Research Summary Guides that are published by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. These guides report the most current information about a variety of diseases ranging from osteoporosis to heart disease. The information about prevention and treatment has essential information for researchers and health-care service providers. While available to patients, it is not always utilized.

"The information is a great value, but in its initial form, it may have little impact," Dutta said. "How do you take this clinical data and communicate in a meaningful way? This is a common challenge in public health. What can add value is shifting the location of decision-making into the hands of the local community and marginalized groups. Without these voices and input from the local community, health solutions may be completely out of sync with the lived experiences of local communities."

Many current health campaigns rely on an approach in which most of the activity happens at the expert level, with the academic expert studying the target population, developing the message and then testing it.

"It seems logical, but when this approach is used materials are developed by experts who can never fully understand the targeted community. Because they are not part of that community, they can miss feedback or reactions that could be critical to developing the message," he said. "Even more importantly, because underserved populations often are evaluated on the basis of criteria imposed by outside experts, the messages developed by experts fail."

During the next three years, Dutta and his team will develop and evaluate training for local leaders in African-American communities on how to develop a strategy to promote health information in the community, evaluate the health disparities hub, and assess how these changes increased and utilized the underserved African-American community's capacity to create relevant information about heart disease. The researchers will establish an advisory panel, conduct focus groups and individual interviews, and offer workshops for local community members to create culturally tailored communication solutions on the basis of the research summary guides.

By taking this kind of community-driven and culture-centered approach, the community participates

in decision making and strategy development while the academic partner plays a capacity-building role that facilitates collaboration and makes resources available to the community, Dutta said.

"Therefore, the solutions originate from within the community and are more likely to resonate with the African-American community members in Lake and Marion counties," said Dutta, who also is associate dean for research and graduate education in the College of Liberal Arts. The concepts of the culture-centered approach are outlined in Dutta's book "Communicating Health: A Culture-Centered Approach."

In addition to partnering with the Indiana Minority Health Coalition, Dutta and his team will work with the Lake County Minority Health Coalition, Minority Health Coalition of Marion County, Purdue's Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering, and the American Hospital Association's Health Research and Educational Trust.

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