

Journeys for heart health: OU receives \$15 million for statewide research project

By: [Kirby Lee Davis](#) The Journal Record May 27, 2015

TULSA – The University of Oklahoma will establish a statewide health care provider network targeting heart disease under a new \$15 million federal grant.

Oklahoma was one of seven recipients chosen from across the nation by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#). The grant represents the largest award of its type ever received in Oklahoma.

“It is a remarkable, remarkable thing,” OU President David L. Boren said during a Wednesday press conference at the [OU-Tulsa Schusterman Center](#). “It’s like a dream come true to see what has happened.”

The three-year grant funds Healthy Hearts for Oklahoma, a new organization led by former OU School of Community Medicine dean F. Daniel Duffy and Steven Crawford, chairman of the OU College of Medicine Department of Family and Preventive Medicine.

Healthy Hearts will spend the next six months evaluating physician practices for inclusion in its new network, Duffy said. While involving the metro areas, Crawford said, the program would focus on rural providers with 10 or fewer physicians.

“The study is to prove how giving that support can help those practices enhance their care for preventing heart disease,” Duffy said. “Does providing that support actually improve outcomes? That’s the goal.”

Crawford said the network will divide Oklahoma into six sections: Oklahoma City, Tulsa and four rural quadrants. Thirty practices will be chosen from each metro area, along with 60 from each quadrant.

Healthy Hearts will begin its research in November, dividing the participating practices into four 75-member groups. One group will begin the program every three months until all four complete an 18-month cycle. Duffy said the pattern allows researchers to factor out anomalies, such as changing payment structures or practice ownership changes.

Crawford said the program will target improvement in four cardiac care areas: smoking, blood pressure, cholesterol, and use of low-dose aspirin. Duffy said Healthy Hearts would provide each practice strategic training with a physician peer coach, weekly visits by a practice enhancement assistant to help improve work flow and practice, technical assistance as needed to meet electronic needs and Healthy Hearts goals, and access to Oklahoma’s Health Information Exchange.

Participant progress and clinical performance will be measured by researchers at the OU Health Sciences Center and the School of Community Medicine, a joint program with the University of Tulsa. The researchers also will coordinate with other grant recipients, Crawford said.

An OU College of Public Health research team will lead the effort under Associate Professor of Health Administration Ann Chou and Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology Chairwoman Julie Stoner.

The result will further a three-pronged goal of improved care, greater efficiency and lower costs, OU-Tulsa Interim President John Schumann said.

"Together we can move Oklahoma from being at the top of lists of states with the highest rates of heart disease to somewhere near the bottom," Duffy said.

Healthy Heart will hire 20 physician enhancement assistants to manage the project and contract out other practice consulting needs.

Other organizations participating in this program include the Oklahoma Foundation for Medical Quality, the Public Health Institute of Oklahoma, the Community Service Council, the Oklahoma Center for Healthcare Improvement, the Oklahoma Primary Care Association, the Oklahoma Area Health Education Centers, the MyHealth Access Network, Coordinated Care Oklahoma, and the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

As Healthy Heart completes its work, Duffy said, he hopes to extend the research network into studies of other diseases.

"The goal is to make this sustainable," he said. "That's going to take a change in the way health care is funded and the way practice research is funded. It's never really been funded before. That's why this is the largest grant that we've ever received. That's why this is the first time that health practice research has been funded on such a large scale."

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