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News Release

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MetroHealth/CWRU-led Research Team Awarded \$2.0 Million Grant to Create Free Health Risk Appraisal Tool Tool will be shared with primary care practices throughout the U.S.

(Cleveland) – Half of the deaths before age 65 can be attributed to lifestyle factors. Determining what factors are under the control of the individual and which may be impacted by social or medical interventions may help reduce those deaths. A Health Risk Appraisal (HRA) can be an important tool in that assessment, but currently an inexpensive, easy-to-use version does not exist. Researchers at the Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) Center for Health Care Research and Policy at MetroHealth have just received a 4-year \$1.95 million grant from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to change that. The researchers will work to create a free, technologically-updated tool that will be shared with primary care practices throughout the United States.

A Health Risk Appraisal tool was first created and used in 1987 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Carter Center in their Health Risk Appraisal Update Project. The director of that project, Dr. Edwin B. Hutchins, updated the HRA in 1997 when he established The Healthier People Network, Inc. (HPN). The HPN HRA has been the standard by which all health risk appraisals have been designed. Dr. Hutchins will be part of the research team involved in this re-engineering project, along with researchers from New York Medical College, CWRU and MetroHealth.

“The Healthier People Network version is the only free software tool available in the public domain right now, but it’s still in the old DOS format, so it’s cumbersome to use and is not feasible for wide use in a variety of primary care settings, some resource rich and other resource poor,” says Joseph J. Sudano, Jr., PhD, assistant professor with the Center for Health Care Research and Policy and lead investigator. “We’ll re-engineer it into a stand-alone and web-based format so pretty much anyone can use it anywhere on the planet.”

The grant was awarded by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services AHRQ, whose mission is to improve the quality, safety, efficiency and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. AHRQ is particularly interested in whether or not HRAs are useful and effective in helping providers and patients achieve better health outcomes in primary care settings.

There are market forces and policy requirements that also contribute to this interest in HRAs. For example, the National Committee for Quality Assurance is a leading organization in quality

accreditation for health plans, preferred provider organizations and managed care organizations. Since 2009, the NCQA accreditation requirements for these programs call for the administration of HRA instruments as part of the process. In addition, the anticipated evolution of primary care practices into Patient-Centered Medical Homes is expected to increase the need for instruments and tools that can help facilitate provider/patient communication and patient education.

This 4-year grant is the first of two phases. Phase one is the re-engineering of the software and pilot testing it with providers using their feedback to tailor it for use in primary care. The second phase will involve another grant employing randomized control trials in a wide variety of primary care setting to investigate its effectiveness.

“As a health disparities researcher, what really makes this grant special for me is that it will lead to the first evaluation of the benefits of an HRA which includes the uninsured and racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diverse populations,” says Dr. Sudano. “This will also give practitioners and providers of care to these groups a useful and effective tool free of charge.”

Dr. Sudano's project is titled " An open-source public domain health risk assessment for use in primary care." He is joined on this grant by fellow CHRP members Adam Perzynski, PhD and Thomas Love, PhD; Metro's Chief Medical Informatics Officer David Kaelber, MD; Edwin B. Huchins, PhD of the Healthier People Network, Atlanta, GA; Robert Amler, MD, Dean and Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics, New York Medical College; Gultekin Ozsoyoglu, PhD, Professor of Computer Science, CWRU; and James Werner, PhD, Asst. Professor of Family Medicine, CWRU.