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Study of genetic screening brings Sanford Health, Harvard together

Collaboration will help guide best practices for offering genetic testing to patients and improving health outcomes

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – A partnership with Sanford Health, Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital will help determine best practices for using genetic screening to improve population health.

The Imagenetics program at Sanford Health offers expanded genetic screening and counseling through primary care clinics, using a simple blood draw and the Sanford Chip, a $49 test that examines patients' DNA. Physicians use this information to more accurately prescribe medications and to identify genetic risk factors and tailor a care plan to address them.

"It's exciting for a research organization and a clinical organization to partner in this way," said Cassie Hajek, M.D., a clinical geneticist and physician chair with Sanford Imagenetics. "The experience that the Harvard research team brings will help us better understand the data we're gathering and what it means for not only our patient population, but others as well.'

The four-year collaboration began this year.

Experts in genomic medicine from Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital will help guide Sanford researchers in using and interpreting data collected through the test. Patients can consent to participate in the study when they sign up for the Sanford Chip. Patients who already have had the test will be contacted separately for consent.

The research collaboration examines a variety of research questions, including how prepared providers are to deliver results to patients, how results affect their prescribing patterns and patient compliance, the health and economic effects of the results and how results affect family members of patients.

"This is a unique opportunity to examine the impact genetic screening has when it's been offered as a clinical service rather than an experimental tool," said Kurt Christensen, Ph.D., who is leading the Harvard team. Christensen's team draws on the skills and experience of analysts and faculty from the Genomes2People Research Program at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, led by medical geneticist Robert Green, M.D., M.P.H.

The Imagenetics program, which began in 2014 thanks to a gift of $125 million from philanthropist Denny Sanford, allowed Sanford Health to embed genetic medicine directly into primary care.

The Sanford Chip is available to eligible patients through their Sanford Health primary care provider. This test will be ordered and the results managed by Sanford primary care providers with support from genetic counselors. Genetic counselors help patients understand the medical, psychological and familial effects of genomics in a disease process.

The Sanford Medical Genetics Laboratory has customized the analysis of specific regions of a patient's genetic code to create unique testing with the Sanford Chip. As a laboratory-developed test, it does not require approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, but all clinical testing is covered by federal laboratory regulations.

About Sanford Health

Sanford Health, one of the largest health systems in the United States, is dedicated to the integrated delivery of health care, genomic medicine, senior care and services, global clinics, research and affordable insurance. Headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the organization includes 44 hospitals, 1,400 physicians and more than 200 Good Samaritan Society senior care locations in 26 states and nine countries. Nearly $1 billion in gifts from philanthropist Denny Sanford have transformed how Sanford Health improves the human condition. For information, visit sanfordhealth.org or Sanford Health News.

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