Diabetes Prevention Initiative Launched

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) has launched Check-UpAmerica, which is aimed at people who are at risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease. The initiative encourages people older than 40 years to have regular checkups and take steps to reduce their risk. The program includes a nationwide radio media tour by Dr. John Buse of the ADA. An online personal assessment tool will be available later this year. For more information, visit www.CheckUpAmerica.org.

NIDDK Director Emphasizes Research, Education

Dr. Rodgers’ priorities include supporting clinical trials and enhancing knowledge dissemination.

By Miriam E. Tucker
Senior Writer

Energy expenditure via hormone signaling, as well as the behavioral and environmental factors contributing to the problem.

Support pivotal clinical studies and trials. Translation of results from two major groundbreaking NIDDK-funded studies—the Diabetes Control and Complications Trial (DCCT) and the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP)—will remain an institute priority. These ongoing efforts include the DCCT follow-up study, the EDIC (Epidemiology of Diabetes Interventions and Complications) trial, and the DPP Outcomes Study.

Two new studies, both focusing on the young, could have major implications for public health policy and clinical management, respectively.

The HEALTHY trial is a multi-site initiative based in 42 middle schools, aimed at determining if changes in food services and physical education classes, along with activities that encourage healthy behaviors, can lower risk factors for type 2 diabetes. Results from this study are expected in 2009.

The other study, called TODAY (Treatment Options for Type 2 Diabetes in Adolescents and Youth), is investigating the best treatments for type 2 diabetes in children. It is still accepting patients. Other clinical studies are focusing on behavioral approaches to reducing obesity in adults in the general population, and in minority groups in particular.

Strategies to maximize research dollars include the funding of ancillary studies to supplement ongoing large clinical trials, as well as supporting a central repository for biologic materials, derived from those trials, that can be accessed by the broader research community.

"We look at these as ways of really extending the investments we’ve already made in clinical trials. The goal is to derive the maximum benefit from our prior investments," Dr. Rodgers said.

 Preserve a stable pool of talented new investigators. Over the past several years, applications from new investigators for regular research (R01) grants have received a two-percentage-point advantage in funding consideration, compared with applications from established investigators. And more recently, new investigator applications that just miss the funding line—commonly called the "payline"—have received second-chance individual consideration via an approach called "special emphasis funding." New investigators may also receive short-term support, called R36 awards, that assist them in collecting preliminary data in order to subsequently submit a revised, stronger application for a longer-term regular research grant in the next cycle.

Unfortunately, "we’ve had to make across-the-board cuts in the size of grants to preserve a payline that has been declining somewhat over the years," Dr. Rodgers said. Another goal is to preserve a cadre of new investigators so we really don’t lose a generation of investigators during this period of some resource allocation challenges.

Foster exceptional research, training, and mentoring opportunities. Maintaining a pipeline of NIDDK-focused investigators is critically important, Dr. Rodgers said. To that end, competitive institutional research training awards will be given to pediatric endocrinologists involved in diabetes research.

He noted that significant support will also continue at the graduate student and postdoctoral levels. “These programs will help ensure that there will be a cadre of well-trained PhD scientists and physician-scientists specializing in endocrinology and diabetes research,” Dr. Rodgers said.

 Ensure knowledge dissemination. Efforts such as the 10-year-old National Diabetes Education Program (cosponsored with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), the National Kidney Disease Education Program, and the Weight-Control Information Network are essential to the institute’s mission. “People talk about bench-to-bedside research, but there are data that currently exist that, if they were implemented in practice, would really provide striking benefits to patients on a large scale. A lot of this is a knowledge gap, and that’s what we’re trying to work with in these education dissemination efforts,” said Dr. Rodgers.

A hematologist by training, Dr. Rodgers has worked at the National Institutes of Health since 1982. He is widely recognized for the development of the first effective therapy for sickle cell anemia, and has performed basic research focused on the understanding of the molecular bases of how drugs induce gamma-globin gene expression. “My own personal work in the area of hematology has provided me with a level of comfort, both in the basic and translational and clinical arenas, that helps guide the way I think about areas of research that the institute is more generally involved in,” he said in the interview.

Resources for NIDDK Initiatives

www.niddkrepository.org. Links to the three repositories through which researchers can access biosamples for clinical trials, for example the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) and the African American Study of Kidney Disease and Hypertension (AASK). www.obesityresearch.nih.gov. Provides information about NIH-supported obesity research and the NIH Obesity Research Task Force. The strategic plan for NIH obesity research also is available through this link.

www.todaystudy.org. Gives information on the TODAY (Treatment Options for Type 2 Diabetes in Adolescents and Youth) trial, aimed at determining the best treatment for type 2 diabetes.

www.nih.gov/news/pr/ aug2006/niddk-28.htm. Links to the press release announcing the launch of the HEALTHY trial, which will determine if changes in middle-school food services and physical education classes—along with activities that encourage healthy behaviors—can lower risk factors for type 2 diabetes.

www.ndep.nih.gov. Links to the Web site of the National Diabetes Education Program. The NDEP, based on the results of several clinical trials, involves public and private initiatives to improve the treatment and outcomes for people with diabetes, promote early diagnosis, and prevent or delay the onset of diabetes.

www.nkdep.nih.gov. Links to the Web site of the National Kidney Disease Education Program. The NKDEP, based on the results of clinical trials, aims to raise awareness of the seriousness of kidney disease, the importance of testing people at high risk (including those with diabetes, high blood pressure, or a family history of kidney failure), and the availability of treatment to prevent or slow kidney failure.