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UB partnership targets autism research

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A group of University at Buffalo researchers have formed a collaboration to advance research into autism and other complex conditions.

The partnership brings UB's Center for Integrated Global Biomedical Sciences (CIGBS) together with The Center for Discovery, a \$100 million nonprofit that develops models of care with residential, education, medical and research services from a 1,500-acre campus in Harris in Sullivan County.

Together, the two organizations will focus on translational research and innovation, lectures and virtual education as well as global outreach through the SUNY Global Health Institute to connect with leading universities and medical institutions around the world.



COURTESY CENTER FOR DISCOVERY

UB researchers have signed a new collaborative agreement to work with the Center for Discovery.

Dr. Gene Morse, a professor in UB's School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, is director of the CIGBS and co-director of the SUNY Global Health Institute. Morse said he sees enormous potential to advance evaluation of biomarkers, drug development and nutritional strategies.

"They have some very innovative prevention and care programs they're studying and evaluating, and we have an interest in trying to bring together more of a biomedical research component," said Morse, who will lead the collaboration with Dr. Theresa Hamlin, associate executive director at the The Center for Discovery.

As an academic research center, there's also an opportunity for UB to analyze existing data and go after federal research dollars, Morse said.

UB brings the university research component to work with a data set on 350 residential clients, some of whom have lived on the campus for more than 20 years, Hamlin said.

"We have so much information about individuals who present with highly complex conditions," she said. "Now teaming up with UB, we'll find what's working and not working with these individuals and really find solutions to problems like Alzheimer's, schizophrenia, not just autism, where nobody has been able to understand them because they're so complex."

UB's global program began a decade ago with a focus on the HIV epidemic through partnerships in Zimbabwe and the West Indies. It has attracted more than \$35 million in grant funding and expanded to include drug development and translational pharmacology.

This new partnership continues that work, Morse said.

"If we can do it with Zimbabwe, we can do it with Sullivan County," Morse said. "We think our interest in health information technology will also bring a component that would be complementing what they're trying to do."

Morse said he also sees opportunity for synergy with SUNY researchers in the fields of autism, human genomics and cannabinoid sciences, which could lead to new uses for medical marijuana as a treatment for drug-resistant epilepsies.

Dr. Jeffrey Lombardo, CIGBS project director at UB for global cannabinoid sciences and health information technology for patient safety, is a key partner in the project as well.

Patrick Dollard, president and CEO of The Center for Discovery, called UB's Center for Integrated Global Biomedical Sciences a perfect partner.

"This could be very, very helpful and could introduce a pharmaceutical to help seizures that isn't as injurious as typical pharma that causes so many other side effects," Dollard said. "The real concern with the approval of medicinal marijuana is there's no dosing formula."

The Center for Discovery recently announced plans to develop a children's specialty hospital as well as a research institute for brain and body health.

The organization is also partnering on cannabinoid and CBD research on epilepsy care with Columbia Care LLC, one of 10 organizations that participates in New York's medical marijuana program, in tandem with researchers from the NYU School of Medicine and medical director of NYU Langone's Comprehensive Epilepsy Center.

Tracey Drury

Reporter

Buffalo Business First

