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Medically Tailored Meals Research Advances with Second NIH Grant

Team of University of North Carolina, Massachusetts General Hospital and Community Servings Awarded \$3.25 Million to Study Clinical Outcomes in Patients with HIV

BOSTON (Jan. 12, 2021) – A “food is medicine” research partnership of [Community Servings](#), University of North Carolina School of Medicine, and Massachusetts General Hospital today announced it received a \$3.25 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to broaden its clinical studies of medically tailored meal delivery, with the goal of understanding how best to address food insecurity in the context of diabetes management for people with HIV.

The five-year “R01” grant is the second major grant awarded to the research team. In July 2020, the NIH granted the group \$2.9 million to study the impact of medically tailored meal delivery programs on individuals with type 2 diabetes and food insecurity.

“This new grant goes to the very root of our 30-year mission, as our organization and others nationwide began by making and delivering nourishing meals to help chronically ill neighbors in need during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1990s,” said David B. Waters, CEO of Community Servings. “We look forward to collaborating with our research partners and advancing our collective understanding of how the medically tailored meal model can improve the health and well-being of people living with HIV.”

The grant will support a randomized clinical trial involving 200 individuals with HIV and type 2 diabetes mellitus in Massachusetts, referred to Community Servings for meals that are medically tailored by registered dietitian nutritionists. Type 2 diabetes mellitus is 1.5 times more common in people with HIV, putting them at greater risk for complications such as chronic kidney disease, cardiovascular disease, and early death.

Because food insecurity is two to three times more common among people with HIV than the general public, this population faces increased medical complications and higher costs of care. In the clinical trial, a diverse group of adults will enroll in Community Servings’ medically tailored meal delivery program and receive an “intensive lifestyle intervention” designed to

improve diabetes self-management and assist with weight loss. A control group will receive the meals along with standard nutrition education.

Dr. Seth A. Berkowitz, assistant professor at the UNC School of Medicine, will lead the project, with participation from Linda Delahanty, a lifestyle intervention investigator and Director of Nutrition and Behavioral Research at the Diabetes Research Center at Massachusetts General Hospital.

“We are eager to explore how the medically tailored meal program plus our evidence-based lifestyle intervention will lead to improvements in hemoglobin A1c, weight, and patient-reported outcomes such as food insecurity, quality of life and diabetes distress,” said Dr. Berkowitz. “This intervention has the potential to improve health and reduce the impact of food insecurity among people with HIV.”

Dr. Berkowitz is also the principal investigator for the study previously funded by the NIH. He previously led a [pilot randomized clinical trial](#) using data from Community Servings that found medically tailored meal delivery successfully improved diet quality and control of the disease among recipients with diabetes and food insecurity. Two other studies led by Dr. Berkowitz in partnership with Community Servings, one published in [Health Affairs](#) and the other in [JAMA Internal Medicine](#), found that medically tailored meals were associated with improved health outcomes and lower health care use and cost.

About Community Servings

Founded in 1990, Community Servings’ mission is to actively engage the community to provide medically tailored, nutritious, scratch-made meals to chronically and critically ill individuals and their families. To help clients maintain their health and dignity, Community Servings provides culturally appropriate meals, nutrition education and counseling, and other community programs. With support from thousands of volunteers, the kitchen team prepares over 800,000 medically tailored meals home-delivered to 3,200 clients annually. For more information about programs and opportunities to volunteer or donate, please visit www.servings.org.

About UNC School of Medicine

The [UNC School of Medicine](#) is North Carolina’s largest medical school graduating approximately 180 new physicians each year. It is consistently ranked among the top medical schools in the U.S., including 1st overall for primary care by U.S. News & World Report, and 6th for research among public universities. More than half of the school’s 1,700 faculty members served as principal investigators on active research awards in 2019. Two UNC School of Medicine faculty members have earned Nobel Prize awards.

About Massachusetts General Hospital

Massachusetts General Hospital, founded in 1811, is the original and largest teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School. The [Mass General Research Institute](#) conducts the largest hospital-based research program in the nation, with an annual research budget of more than \$1 billion and comprises more than 8,500 researchers working across more than 30 institutes, centers and

departments. In August 2020, Massachusetts General Hospital was named #6 in the nation by U.S. News & World Report in its list of “America’s Best Hospitals.”

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