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NIH announces 2017 ICEMR awards for 7 international malaria research centers

April 21, 2017

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), today announced approximately \$9 million in first-year funding, subject to availability, for seven malaria research centers around the world. The 7-year awards continue NIAID's 2010 program that created the International Centers of Excellence for Malaria Research (ICEMRs) in regions where malaria is endemic. The awards fund three new and four existing centers that work in 14 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

"NIAID-supported ICEMRs have made significant contributions to malaria research since their creation in July 2010," said NIAID Director Anthony S. Fauci, M.D. "We look forward to their continued multidisciplinary efforts to further our understanding of the complex interactions between human hosts, mosquito vectors and the *Plasmodium* parasites that cause malaria, so that we may work toward controlling, eliminating and eventually eradicating this global scourge."

Despite significant progress in reducing malaria incidence and mortality, the World Health Organization estimates that 212 million new cases of malaria and 429,000 malaria deaths occurred in 2015, mostly in Africa. Although numerous vaccine candidates to prevent malaria are in development, none have been approved for widespread use. Effective malaria drugs are available, but some have severe side effects, may be difficult to procure in remote regions, and are losing their effectiveness in some places as malaria-causing parasites have developed resistance. Mosquito control, which relies largely on bed nets and insecticides, is still a front-line defense in regions where malaria is endemic, but changes in mosquito behavior and insecticide resistance are increasing concerns.

"The 2017 awards under the ICEMR program will enable scientists to continue vital malaria research, which often straddles disciplines to address the most pressing problems and practicalities of fighting malaria," said Lee Hall, M.D., Ph.D., Chief of NIAID's Parasitology and International Programs Branch.

Under the previous awards, ICEMR researchers found evidence that some

current rapid diagnostic tests are failing to detect malaria in some regions because malaria parasites do not always express the antigen the test is designed to detect. ICERM research also has confirmed a significant shift in the behavior of some malaria-carrying mosquitoes, perhaps in response to malaria control measures. Malaria is typically transmitted by *Anopheles* mosquitoes biting indoors late at night, but more mosquitoes now appear to be biting outdoors and earlier in the evening, when people are not sleeping under protective bed nets.

"The impact of research performed by the ICERM network goes beyond the results of individual experiments," Dr. Hall noted. "For example, the program has placed many parasite and mosquito genomes into the public domain, to assist other researchers in developing the next generation of drugs, vaccines and diagnostics."

The recipients of the ICERM awards announced today are as follows:

Amazonian Center of Excellence in Malaria Research

Principal Investigator: Joseph Vinetz, M.D.

Lead Institution: University of California, San Diego

Multidisciplinary Research for Malaria Control and Prevention in West Africa

Principal Investigator: Seydou Doumbia, M.D., Ph. D.

Lead Institution: University of Sciences, Techniques & Technologies of Bamako, Bamako, Mali

Malaria Transmission and the Impact of Control Efforts in Southern and Central Africa

Principal Investigator: William Moss, M.D.

Lead Institution: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore

Program for Resistance, Immunology, Surveillance & Modeling of Malaria in Uganda (PRISM)

Principal Investigator: Grant Dorsey, M.D.

Lead Institution: University of California, San Francisco

Environmental Modifications in sub-Saharan Africa: Changing Epidemiology, Transmission and Pathogenesis of Plasmodium falciparum and P. vivax Malaria

Principal Investigator: Guiyun Yan, Ph.D.

Lead Institution: University of California, Irvine

Southeast Asia Malaria Research Center

Principal Investigator: Liwang Cui, Ph.D.

Lead Institution: Pennsylvania State University, University Park

Myanmar Regional Center of Excellence for Malaria Research

Principal Investigators: Christopher Plowe, M.D., M.P.H., and Myaing Myaing Nyunt, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D.

Lead Institution: University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore

Source:

<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/news-events/nih-funds-seven-international-centers-excellence-malaria-research>
