

Grant Funding for HIV and Hepatitis C Early Detection May Also Prevent Development of Liver Cancer

Researchers and clinicians at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center who focus on liver cancer may benefit from a new grant that will fund HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) studies at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.



Opt-out testing can play a strong role in getting more individuals tested, extending earlier and better care to people who have been infected.

Study leaders Dushyantha Jayaweera, M.D., professor of clinical medicine and senior associate dean for research, and Emmanuel Thomas, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of microbiology and immunology, at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine have received a \$300,000 Frontlines of Communities in the United States (FOCUS) grant from Gilead Sciences, Inc., to develop a replicable model program that embodies best practices in HIV and HCV screening and linkage to care. The one-year program, which usually is renewed for subsequent years, may also be expanded to include Hepatitis B (HBV) in the future.



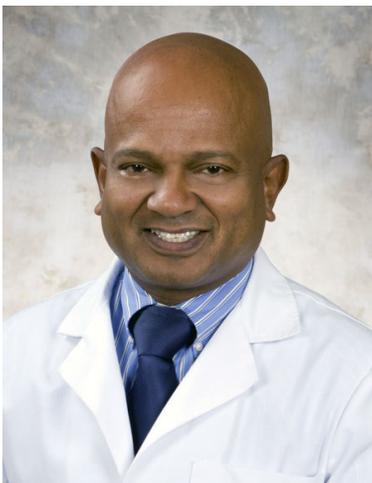
Emmanuel Thomas, M.D.,
Ph.D.

“This funding will enable us to develop a program structured to deal with the current gap in care caused by the inability to identify and ultimately treat many HIV- and HCV- infected individuals,” said Dr. Thomas, who is a member of Sylvester. “Treating HCV-infected patients is especially important, given that this virus can cause liver cancer, which is one of the few cancers currently increasing in incidence.”

A growing body of research has shown that opt-out testing, where patients are informed that testing will occur unless they explicitly decline to be tested, can play a strong role in getting more people tested.

“We are thankful to Gilead for this grant, which will enable our clinicians to better serve patients,” Dr. Jayaweera said. “It will help us to detect HIV and HCV early and prevent the spread of these diseases, as well as mitigate downstream complications.”

The rate of new HCV infections is climbing in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Research suggests that the increase in HCV can be linked to the increase of injection drug use. In addition, Florida has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic, and Miami has the highest rate of new HIV infections in the country. That has made identifying patients with HIV and hepatitis C crucial to improving the overall health of the state.



Dushyantha Jayaweera,
M.D.

“The Miller School’s participation in the FOCUS partnership is an excellent example of how we turn vision into action — using cross-disciplinary collaboration to leverage our expertise and benefit the entire local community,” said Henri R. Ford, M.D., MHA, dean and chief academic officer of the Miller School. “In addition to helping prevent disease transmission through early identification, our program also links patients to care, which is now more important than ever given that HCV is largely curable, and HIV can be managed as a chronic condition.”

Gilead Sciences, Inc., a research-based biopharmaceutical company, launched FOCUS in 2010 to address the issue of HIV/AIDS transmissions and early detection. At the time, it was estimated that one in five HIV-positive Americans didn’t know they were infected with HIV. HCV testing was added in 2013 and HBV testing in 2015. Today, FOCUS partners with more than 100 health care institutions, government agencies and community stakeholders to make routine HIV, HCV and HBV screening a standard of care, and ensure strong linkage to care and treatment.