

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

CONTRACT WITH UMMC FOR LOCAL PORTION OF NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STUDY TO END, RESEARCH TO CONTINUE

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JACKSON, Miss. – Federal-level restructuring of the National Children's Study will end the University of Mississippi Medical Center's involvement, meaning the loss of 53 local jobs and non-renewal of a five-year \$12.8 million research contract that ends this month.

The Hinds County portion of the study will continue tracking progress of about 100 mothers and children already enrolled locally in the NCS Vanguard Study. The Vanguard Study, a sort of pilot to identify best practices and alternate methods for the NCS Main Study, involved recruitment at 40 locations including Hinds County.

The NCS Main Study, scheduled to begin in 2014, aims to follow more than 100,000 children from before birth to age 21 with regular checkups, scans, questionnaires and interviews. By examining the effects of environment on the children's growth and development, researchers hope to improve the health and wellbeing of children for generations to come. It is not known whether Hinds County will be a part of the Main Study.

The restructuring, announced by the National Institutes of Health, changes the study's enrollment and management model. Instead of using health-research and community-outreach teams at medical centers around the country to enroll and monitor participants in their local areas, the NIH will centralize and contract those duties to four regional operating centers.

The Medical Center's five-year contract to operate the Hinds County, MS Vanguard Study site ends Sept. 27.

NCS Hinds County Location Principal Investigator Dr. Sharon Wyatt and her team had reached its initial enrollment target of about 100 participants in the Vanguard Study. Under the changes, those Hinds County mothers and babies will remain in the Vanguard. They are an important part of the main study, and it needs their involvement, Wyatt said.

"The Vanguard Study informs everything that happens in the main study. It shows us how to effectively collect data, keep in touch with participants and their families, what to ask and so on," she said. "They will continue to be followed for 21 years but a transition in contractors will occur."

A research corporation, RTI International, received a contract to follow the Hinds County Vanguard Study members through spring 2013. The contract will then transition to whichever applicant becomes the Southeastern regional operating center.

With about 4,000 families participating in the Vanguard Study nationally, each regional operating center will cover about 1,000 families.

As of the end of August, four people from Wyatt's team had been laid off and the remainder had either found positions within UMMC or other state agencies.

"At the outset, the expectation of the contract was that the NIH would keep renewing the study contract every five years through the 21-year life of the study," Wyatt said. "We were very successful in all areas and were very well respected both regionally and nationally. We met the goals of the first phase of the study and had positive support."

Wyatt said her group plans to donate its 10 federally purchased desktop computers and 25 tablets to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Mississippi.

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