CERC and CERTS: Taking Community-Academic Partnerships to the Next Level

Community Engaged Research Center (CERC)
The Community-Engaged Research Center (CERC) is committed to improving community health by facilitating collaborative research partnerships that include Chicago-area organizations, community-based clinicians and Northwestern University (NU) academic partners. One of five centers of the Northwestern University Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute (NUCATS), CERC is a key contributor to its mission of translational research, ensuring that community organizations and primary-care physicians share a collaborative role in outlining research priorities and applying findings to improve the health of individuals and families in Chicagoland.

The core of CERC is exemplified in two programs:
- **Alliance for Research in Chicagoland Communities (ARCC):** The alliance supports Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), which emphasizes community priorities, equal academic-community partnerships, and data-driven policy decisions. ARCC provides seed grants, workshops, partnership facilitation, and other activities.
- **Practice-Based Research Program (PBRP):** PBRP draws on the experience and insight of practicing clinicians to identify and frame research questions whose answers can improve the practice of primary care. The PBRP provides support by facilitating communication between academic and community partners, sponsoring a seed grant program, developing materials related to IRB issues, and leading other activities.

Community-Engaged Research Team Support (CERTS)
CERC received an administrative supplement grant from National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to create the Community-Engaged Research Team Support (CERTS) program. CERTS is an intensive year-long program (7/1/11 - 6/30/12) with the dual goal of 1) Helping community-academic teams build capacity for rigorous community-engaged research, and 2) Leading the teams to write a solid draft of a federal grant proposal by the end of the program.

Six academic-community teams are participating, all of which implemented successful ARCC or PBRP seed grants in the past. A CERTS advisory committee is comprised of members of community-based organizations, clinical practices, Northwestern University, University of Chicago, and University of Illinois at Chicago. In addition to providing targeted educational workshops and didactic webinars, CERTS connects teams with mentors, resources and a collaborative learning environment that help address specific research concerns. In partnership with Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH), CERTS culminates in a mock proposal review process that prepares teams to be successful in future grant application development.

CERTS incubates novel community-engaged research support structures that will be incorporated into NUCATS elements to ensure sustainability. Ultimately, the resources and elements produced through CERTS will be available to community-academic teams and other entities that are interested in taking their partnership to the next level of research and advances in community health.