

H E A L T H C A R E

Munson partners with MSU for public health research

Federal grant funds could contribute to the local economy

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TRAVERSE CITY — Officials from Munson Medical Center and the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine met Thursday to discuss an upcoming research collaboration.

The institutions partnered to embark on public health

research projects throughout northwest Lower Michigan that could also contribute to the region's economic development.

"The focus is on population health now," said Derk Pronger, Munson's chief operating officer. "This is a great opportunity for us to work together to improve a lot of lives in the community."

Jean Kerver, an epidemiologist and assistant professor at the MSU College of Human Medicine, will work at its Traverse City extension to study how lifestyle factors during pregnancy — such as diet and nutrition —

can impact a child's growth and development.

"I've been expanding some studies that started in Lansing and Detroit and trying to bring them up here," Kerver said. "We started a successful pilot last spring with 70 pregnant women from the Grand Traverse Women's Clinic."

The study collects blood and urine samples from pregnant women, and asks them questions throughout their pregnancy. It will follow them and their children from pregnancy through their childhood years to

determine whether certain diets and lifestyles during pregnancy impact developmental factors like a child's cognitive behavior or IQ.

"We'll follow their children for at least five years, but we won't wait until then to present results," Kerver said. "We'll do short-term, medium and long-term outcomes. We're trying to answer questions along the way."

Results from the Grand Traverse region will be combined

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MSU

*Munson, MSU
to partner for
health research*

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with research throughout Michigan for a statewide project, she said. Michigan could receive a \$23 million grant to split between 10 communities — including Traverse City — for the research. A decision from the federal government on the grant should come by the end of September, Kerver said.

The grant money, distributed over a seven-year period, would largely go toward faculty salary and creating local jobs to conduct the study, she said.

“It’s all part of economic development,” said Aron Sousa, MD, interim dean at the MSU College of Human Medicine. “When they get grants, that work

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gets done here and that money gets spent in this community.”

Epidemiologist Kelly Hirko also will work with students at Munson on a research project linking certain lifestyle factors to breast cancer risk. Hirko recently became an assistant professor at the MSU College of Human Medicine in Traverse City.

“I’m interested in looking at the clinical populations of women with breast cancer here and trying to see how lifestyle factors — particularly diet, obesity and physical activity — might influence progression of the disease and outcomes.”