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Walking Forward Receives \$1.6 Million Grant for Lung Cancer Screening Research

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (Feb. 20, 2018) – Avera Health is pleased to announce that the Walking Forward Program, based in Rapid City, has been awarded a grant for over \$1.6 million from the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation to increase lung cancer screening rates for high-risk smokers living in western South Dakota.

The award, which will be distributed over the course of three years (2018-2020), will fund Walking Forward’s research dedicated to increasing awareness of lung cancer prevention and access to advanced lung cancer screening technology.

In 2002, Walking Forward was developed and has been led by Daniel Petereit, MD, FASTRO, who is also the principal investigator on the study and a radiation oncologist at Regional Health – John T. Vucurevich Cancer Care Institute. While the program was created to address the high cancer mortality rates among American Indians in western South Dakota, this research will address the entire West River population. Walking Forward is integrated with Avera Health and works closely with Regional Health, and through this collaboration, grant monies are managed through Avera.

Low dose computed axial tomography (LDCT) scans are an effective way to screen for and diagnose lung cancer sooner, resulting in earlier treatment and lower mortality rates. However, this screening method is underutilized in western South Dakota.

“Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in South Dakota, and can be detected earlier using LDCTs. We are very grateful and excited to be the recipient of this grant which may lead to higher cure rates for this deadly cancer,” said Petereit. “Through this research, we’ll work with high-risk community members and primary care providers in western South Dakota, including those on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations, to investigate the effectiveness of two interventions to increase lung cancer screening among high-risk smokers. It will also be a mutual collaboration between Avera Health in Sioux Falls and Regional Health in Rapid City.”

As part of the study, the Walking Forward team will offer health care providers and clinic staff with educational opportunities designed to increase their awareness of and ability to identify and refer high-risk tobacco users to LDCT lung cancer screenings. They will also host community workshops to educate those who are considered high risk for developing lung cancer about the importance and availability of lung cancer screening.

“We are thrilled to partner with Avera Health on this initiative that will focus on a rural frontier population and American Indians in South Dakota,” said John Damonti, President of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation. “Lung cancer incidence for American Indians in this region is the highest in the country and this initiative will look to understand the low utilization of LDCT and develop interventions to help increase uptake and referral. We are particularly interested in our partner’s engagement of community members, state and tribal leaders and primary care providers in a strategic health forum to promote evidence-based practice and policy recommendations.”

Through this study and the ongoing work of Walking Forward, Petereit and his team hope to decrease lung cancer mortality rates by increasing LDTC lung cancer screening and early detection, thereby leading to successful treatment.

For more information about Walking Forward, visit www.avera.org/walking-forward.