

CUMC to Help Lead National Precision Medicine Initiative

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The National Institutes of Health recently chose Columbia as one of four universities to lead the enrollment of patients in its ambitious new Precision Medicine Initiative.

Over the next five years, physicians at Columbia University Medical Center, working with colleagues at New York–Presbyterian, Weill Cornell Medical, and the Harlem Hospital Center, will seek to enroll 150,000 volunteers who are willing to have their genomes analyzed and their health monitored for years to come. These patients will be among some one million Americans who are expected to participate in the nationwide Precision Medicine Initiative Cohort Program, which aims to discover new links between DNA and disease.

People who enroll as subjects will be asked to contribute detailed information about their lifestyles and medical histories and share their genomic and other biological information through blood and urine tests. Some participants will be asked to carry mobile health devices and download apps that will provide researchers real-time information about their levels of physical activity and environmental exposure. Researchers say that the enormous amount of data they hope to gather will enable them to identify risk factors for disease and determine which patients may respond best to existing medicines or new targeted therapies.

According to a press release issued by the National Institutes of Health, the Precision Medicine Initiative, which was announced by President Barack Obama '83CC last year, “is one of the most ambitious research projects in history and will set the foundation for new ways of engaging people in research.”

Biomedical informatics experts at CUMC will also be helping to ensure the quality of data collected in other US cities as part of the Precision Medicine Initiative Cohort Program.

The other academic institutions coordinating the first phase of patient recruitment

are Northwestern University, the University of Arizona, and the University of Pittsburgh.

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