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Eli Lilly and Company Foundation Gives \$480,000 to Healthcare Literacy Project

INDIANAPOLIS – People who speak little or no English can face life-threatening barriers to proper medical care in the United States when that care requires completing paperwork or taking medicine as prescribed.

Diverse cultural beliefs among immigrant groups can also hamper compliance with doctor's orders.

With a gift from a foundation bearing the name of a leading global pharmaceutical company, a group of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis researchers hope to help bridge language and cultural gaps between physicians and their nonnative English-speaking patients.

The Eli Lilly and Company Foundation has awarded a \$480,000 grant to the Indiana Center for Intercultural Communication (ICIC) at IUPUI for a literacy project aimed to improve health maintenance and disease management among limited English speakers and other low literate patients.

During the first year of the ambitious three-year project, ICIC researchers will study how diabetes patients acquire healthcare information and interpret medication labels and patient information leaflets based on their cultural beliefs, English language skills and educational levels.

The researchers will correlate the patients' use of medical information with their adherence to medication regimens as measured by self-reports, refill records and medical outcomes such as blood pressure and cholesterol readings.

The long-term goal for the project is to develop effective training and communication tools that will allow those with limited English proficiency skills to better access medical information and treatment.

"Our approach," says ICIC Director and English Professor Ulla Connor, "recognizes that language use and cultural beliefs play a role in accessing and processing information. These aspects ultimately affect diagnosis, treatment, medication adherence, and health outcomes."

Improved intercultural communication between patients and healthcare professionals will promote better health maintenance and disease management leading to longer and healthier lives, the director said.

ICIC, based in the Department of English in the School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI, is an internationally recognized leader in linguistic research for fund-raising communication and professional training in the emerging field of English for Specific Purposes. The Eli Lilly and Company Foundation grant allows ICIC's interdisciplinary transnational research team to extend its research leadership to address health communications.

"We are delighted by the role the Lilly Foundation is playing because it will permit ICIC to take leadership in improving healthcare delivery by applying intercultural linguistic research," Connor says.

The second year of the Eli Lilly-funded project calls for extending protocols developed for diabetes patients to patient groups with other conditions, including cardio-vascular disease. The plan also calls for development of guidelines for healthcare providers, pharmacies, and community services that will increase comprehension of medication information in ways most efficacious to varying cultural identities.

Third-year goals include recommending and disseminating guidelines nationally to improve medication adherence across cultural and educational boundaries; and to provide recommendations for improved Patient Information Leaflets and for comprehensible summaries.