Seed Grant Website Description: Optimizing HPV-based Cervical Cancer Screening in Ghana

**A new research partnership to understand and address the barriers to cervical cancer screening in Ghana**

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***The inaugural IGCPR Seed Grant was awarded*  *to co-Principal Investigators Dr. Shalini Kulasingam (School of Public Health, UMN) and Dr. Adwoa Bemah Baomah Mensah (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology [KNUST], Ghana). Other team members include Dr. Beth Virnig (School of Public Health, UMN) and Dr. Thomas Okpoti Konney (Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital [KATH], Ghana). Congratulations, team!***

Screening for cervical cancer is a powerful tool for preventing mortality from this type of cancer. However, screening rates are low among women in low and middle income countries, resulting in stark disparities in cervical cancer burden around the world. This critical public health problem is highly relevant to Ghana where cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths and only 2 to 4% of women have been screened.

The multidisciplinary team of investigators from the UMN, KNUST and KATH includes epidemiologists and oncologists who will join efforts in a project that will use a combination of qualitative interviews to understand barriers to cervical cancer screening and a pilot study of self-collected HPV tests. The study will be conducted in urban and semi-rural settings in Kumasi, Ghana, where a combination of barriers is likely to be responsible for the low participation in cervical cancer screening.

***From joint mentorship to research partnership***. Drs. Kulasingam and Virnig first connected with Dr. Mensah as co-mentors to a PhD student in the School of Public Health, Dr. Waruiru Mburu. This connection then evolved into a partnership that grew to include cervical cancer research, a leading cause of death for women in countries without screening programs. “Ghana currently does not have a screening program,” noted Dr. Kulasingam. “This project is specifically looking to address the barriers to the implementation of such a program”

***Anticipated impact***. The goal of this project is to understand what hurdles exist in implementing a cervical cancer screening program and explore how these hurdles could be addressed. Given that the aims are very qualitative and that focus groups will include multiple stakeholders like patients and clinicians, the researchers involved in the study hope that the obtained data will be reflective of the Ghanian community’s thinking around cervical cancer screening. Additionally, this interdisciplinary project is likely to inform similar efforts in Minnesota addressing gaps in cervical cancer screening for certain immigrant populations and other underscreened communities.