

Research center seeks funding

Proposed ISM needs \$180 million

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The Institute for Systems Medicine — a proposed new Spokane-based medical research center — would need \$180 million in funding during its first five years of operation, according to a 34-page prospectus released this week.

The financial predictions contained in the report are based on a study of the proposed center conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Lewis Rumpler, the institute's chief executive officer and one of the report's authors, said the center would be devoted to unraveling genetic mysteries to help better predict, detect, prevent and treat disease.

Plans call for \$50 million in pledges and funding to be secured by fall 2007, Rumpler said. With that in hand, recruiting of top-flight medical researchers from around the globe could begin and the institute could open its doors in January 2008.

Seven years after its launch, the report said, the institute should be fully operational, employing about 230 scientists and support staff with an annual operating budget of about \$37 million.

"It's a very bold project — bold in both financial and scientific scope and in its principle partnerships," said Rumpler.

The ISM organizing group will seek funding during the upcoming Washington legislative session, but Rumpler declined to give a dollar amount.

While he expects some people will suffer sticker shock when they see the financial outlay, he said it was important the prospectus give the community as realistic a look at the institute as possible.

ISM's focus

The proposed Institute for Systems Medicine would concentrate on a promising new field of medical research called epigenomics, the study of inherited changes in genes thought to cause cancer, diabetes and other serious diseases.

The payoff would be high, Rumpler added: the institute could become a global player in revolutionizing the field of medicine, making it far better at predicting, diagnosing and treating many conditions such as cancer, heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes.

Affiliates of the institute are expected to include faculty and students from the region's five major universities, area health care providers and corporate and private entities, according to the report.

The prospectus also notes that:

- The institute would encompass research programs, clinical and scientific laboratories and administrative departments; a satellite site would be opened in Pullman to facilitate research collaborations with Washington State University.
- It could generate up to \$25 million annually through research, technology-transfer and service revenues.
- That revenue wouldn't cover the institute's operations budget, however, resulting in a need for \$10 million to \$15 million a year in "gap funding," which would come from public and private sources.
- Funding for the institute and its activities will be sought from federal, state and local governments, higher education, clinical partners, philanthropists, biotech and pharmaceutical industries and corporations.

Rumpler expects the institute would draw to the region about 100 new families whose spending would create beneficial ripples throughout the region's economy.

To date, he said, the institute has received \$1 million from state coffers, \$250,000 from Spokane County, pledges of nearly \$500,000 from the region's private and public universities and \$300,000 in private support. The organization also is in line to receive a \$500,000 appropriation from the U.S. Department of Defense.