

# FOCUS ON: RESEARCH

## Community-based initiative promotes prevention, control of cancer in Eastern Ky.

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**LEXINGTON** – Richard A. Crosby in the University of Kentucky College of Public Health has received a five-year, multi-million dollar grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Along with Dr. Baretta R. Casey, director of the UK Center for Excellence in Rural Health-Hazard, Crosby will use this funding to conduct community-based participatory research in Appalachia with a focus on cancer prevention and control.

“The CDC has asked us to focus on one health condition and we’ve selected cancer,” said Crosby. “We have multiple opportunities with cancer either for prevention, which is preferred, and if not prevention then early diagnosis.”

Through this grant, the Rural Cancer Prevention Center will be housed in Hazard and will cater to the 23-county service area of the UK Center for Excellence in Rural Health-Hazard.

The Center for Excellence in Rural Health-Hazard was established in 1990 to address health disparities in rural Kentucky, including a chronic shortage of health professionals and residents’ poor health status.

One primary emphasis of the project will be the acceptance of the vaccine against cervical cancer.

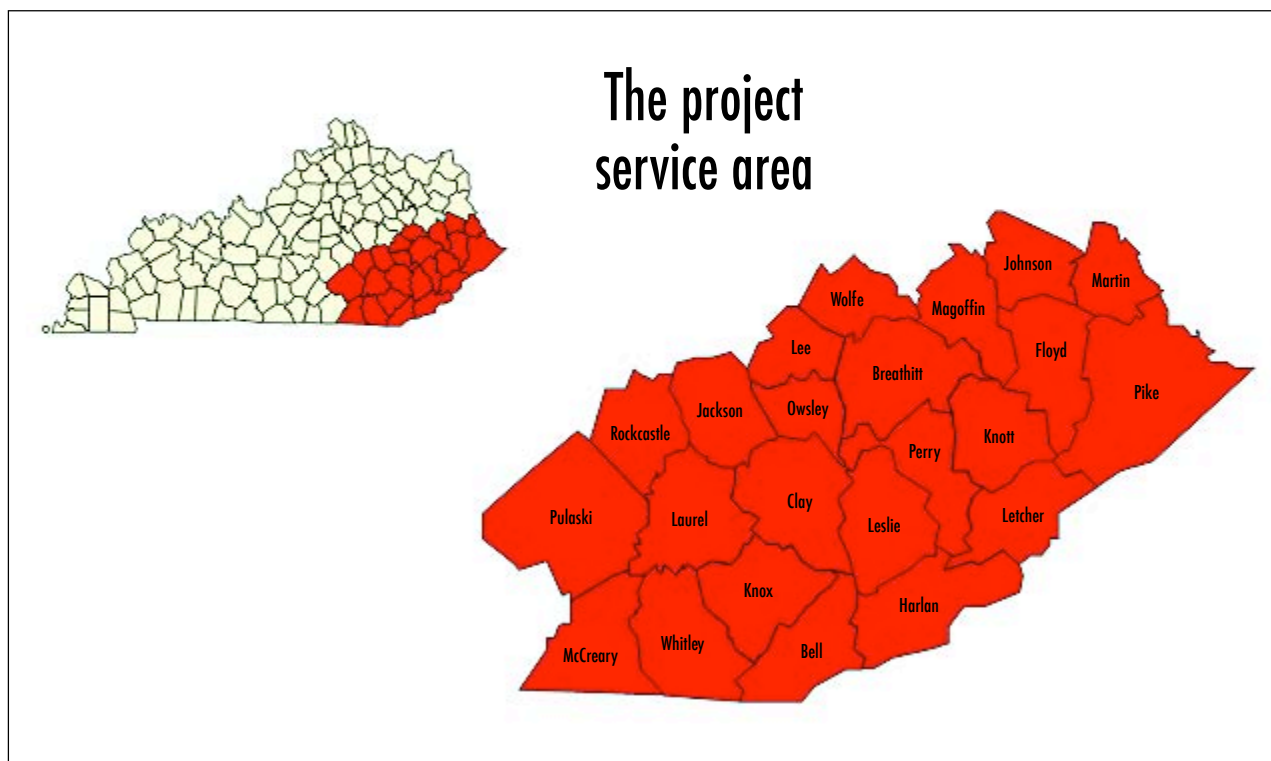
“The uptake of Gardasil in this area, even when given away, is extremely low,” said Crosby. “We find that less than 30 percent of young women offered the vaccine will accept even the first dose for free. It’s even more difficult when you talk about the second or third dose. One major emphasis of the project will be 100 percent vaccine coverage for every eligible person in the area.”

The project will also be looking for ways to prevent other types of cancer that are quite common in Eastern Kentucky.

“We know that, in Kentucky, most colorectal cancers are found late and there is no reason for that to happen,” added Crosby. “Finding a cancer late equates with a prognosis that’s dismal. We want to change that. We may not prevent these cancers but we can catch them early so the prognosis all of a sudden becomes hopeful instead of dismal.”

The majority of the research for this project will be done on a localized level by Casey and the broad network that she and the employees of the Center for Excellence in Rural Health-Hazard have established in Eastern Kentucky.

“The community liaisons who will talk and meet with the participants of the research project are people from the community, so they trust them and they understand them,” said Casey. “They know they’ve grown up just like they have and have the same problems.



The project service area

Graphics by David A. Gross, UK Center for Excellence in Rural Health-Hazard

The Rural Cancer Prevention Center, which will be based in Hazard, is intended to serve 23 counties in southeastern Kentucky. The table below shows that cancer-related death rates within the region exceed state and/or national averages. Initial research activities are scheduled to begin in September.

### Cancer death rates by location

Type of cancer	Deaths per 100,000 population		
	Service area	State	Nation
Breast	26	27	26
Colorectal	29	23	20
Lung/bronchus	97	80	55
Prostate	33	33	28

Note: Service area means are not weighted by county populations.

Source: Staff analysis of Kentucky Institute of Medicine data, 2007

That is a voice that they believe, so it’s much easier to go into the community to be able to do this research.”

The hope is that this localized approach will enable researchers to turn their findings around quickly and have a positive effect on communities to improve health disparities. The project is scheduled to begin in September and will build on the shoulders of the previous PRC, which is under the direction of Mark Dignan from the UK College of Medicine.

“The rates of cancer in Eastern Kentucky are among the highest in the nation, so it’s such a valid point for us to be addressing one of the most devastating morbidity and mortality issues,” said Casey. “I think it’s even more important that as we do this study we can begin to educate the population so they want to accept prevention and early diagnosis. The hope is that on down the road you can begin to look at the factors that are causing the rates to be so much higher other

than access to medical care and education of the population.”

Casey believes there are other factors in Eastern Kentucky that cause higher rates of cancer, whether environmental or cultural, that could also be addressed as a result of this research.

“This project is very much about rectifying the rural health disparities that exist in Eastern Kentucky and using what we learn as a model for other people in this country to follow,” said Crosby. “That’s why CDC is funding the study. It is a model of rectifying rural health disparities in rural America.

“The (CDC’s) concern is more with the U.S. than Kentucky, per se, but due to the extreme level of cancer risk in our state, Kentucky is an excellent place to begin this emphasis on prevention. Indeed, this is the ideal opportunity to show that prevention and early diagnosis for these common cancers can make a difference and eventually have an impact on the morbidity and mortality rates in this state.”

As a land grant university, UK has a mission to address some of the most challenging issues within the state and this project is a prime example of how the university is taking action.

Casey, a native of Pike County, has been a practicing physician in the area where she was raised and she knows first-hand the need for this type of ongoing research.

“Part of the reason I became a doctor was the overwhelming need for health care where I grew up,” said Casey. “My grandmother was a midwife and I went with her a lot because there were very few doctors. I saw a lot of people die very early from things that could have been cured if they’d had the access that we hope to be able to provide.”