

## Coming to Indy: pioneering research

Medical studies  
institute will take  
broad, decadeslong  
look at health woes

**By Shari Rudavsky**

[shari.rudavsky@indystar.com](mailto:shari.rudavsky@indystar.com)

Indianapolis is poised to become home to a medical research center that will study heart problems and other illnesses in a new way, through decadeslong scrutiny of people's lifestyles, genetics and other physiological traits.

Today, local academic, industry and community leaders plan to announce the formation of the Fairbanks Institute, whose work will differ from other research that takes a relatively narrow approach to addressing medical problems.

"It's kind of a bridge-building institute, and we'll be

keeping the roadwork going so that the roads are always open," said Dr. Keith March, director for Indiana University's Indiana Center for Vascular Biology and Medicine.

Indianapolis serves as an ideal home for such a center because of its use of electronic medical records and an abundance of residents whose health problems make them good test subjects.

The city is among only a few of its size to use electronic records, which will streamline data collection for studies, said Leonard Betley, president of the Indianapolis-based Fairbanks Foundation. The foundation, named for late Indianapolis business leader Richard M. Fairbanks, is providing a \$10 million startup grant, its largest gift

**See Research, Page A4**

# Research

◆ Heart disease study will follow up to 5,000 patients.

From A1

ever.

"We have the ability to build very large databases and to manipulate those in a useful, medical-research-friendly way that no other community of our size has," Betley said. "There's obvious health implications, both in terms of health of our community and in terms of research that may go beyond our community."

In terms of community health, the state falls in the worst third of states for deaths from heart disease; in 2003, more than 15,000 people died from the condition.

March will be involved with the institute's first study on heart disease. In its first two years, the institute will enroll about 1,000 patients from the community in that study. Within five years the number of enrollees will swell to about 5,000.

Eventually the institute plans to expand its study to diseases like cancer, said David Johnson, president of BioCrossroads. A local nonprofit promoting the life sciences, BioCrossroads is partnering with Indiana University, the Regenstrief Institute and others to form the Fairbanks Institute. The organization also received \$500,000 from the Guidant Foundation.

Doctors have long looked to long-term studies to improve knowledge about prevention and treatment of heart diseases.

One of the most famous, the Framingham Heart Study, follows about 15,000 people, three generations of residents of the Massachusetts town. That study led to the discovery of heart disease risk factors like cholesterol, diabetes and smoking.

The Fairbanks Institute will take that one step further by looking at genetics and other physiological factors. Researchers will examine the protein, genes and lifestyle of participants and follow them over time.

## THE FAIRBANKS NAME



The Fairbanks Institute takes its name from late Indianapolis business leader Richard M. Fairbanks (above). His name also graces the Fairbanks Foundation, which is giving the institute \$10 million in startup money.

The scion of the family that owned The Indianapolis News, Fairbanks helped negotiate that paper's 1948 sale to Eugene C. Pulliam. Also in 1948, he formed Fairbanks Communications to buy WIBC-AM (1070). Over the next 50 years, his company ran 20 radio stations, an Atlanta TV station and a charter plane company. He also established the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Radio Network. The 1934 Yale graduate and World War II veteran formed the foundation that bears his name in 1986. He served as its president until his death in August 2000.

— Shari Rudavsky

"The comprehensive view has not been taken in any other study," March said. "We want to take a snapshot of where the person is. Then we will ask what does that tell us about a person's state today and what does it tell us in the future."

By looking at people over time, they may learn why some people who have heart attacks do well and others do poorly.

This broad-based approach will set the institute apart from others, say experts and those involved with its creation.

"It is very big science," said Dr. Douglas Marchuk, a professor in the department of molecular genetics and microbiology at Duke University Medical School, who will serve on the institute's external advisory committee. "It's the way I think

**"We want to take a snapshot of where the person is ... (and) ask what does that tell us about a person's state today and what does it tell us in the future."**

Dr. Keith March, Indiana Center for Vascular Biology and Medicine

we're going to have to start doing biomedical research in the future, combining really good population-based clinical data with modern biology."

Traditionally, research occurs in "pockets of science," where scientists focus on their specialty, said Dr. Christopher Callahan, director of the Center for Aging Research at Indiana University, who is directing communications for the venture.

The institute will aim to encourage scientists to work together. While the Fairbanks Institute will eventually have a facility and staff of its own — with a CEO expected on board by September — most of the scientists will continue to work in their own laboratories and confer as needed.

"The science we're describing is an experiment itself," Callahan said. Experts agreed the institute could forge a new research model.

While the National Institutes of Health encourages such initiatives in theory, in reality funding does not tend to support such efforts, said Elena Andresen, an epidemiologist at the University of Florida.

"It's very challenging and very expensive to do this kind of work," she said. "This seems fairly unique to me ... Scientists don't get the opportunity to do this very often."

★ Call Star reporter Shari Rudavsky at (317) 444-6354.