

Pitt to open health research center

\$20 million donated in initiative to reduce disparities in women's care

By Hanna Webster
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The University of Pittsburgh, armed with \$20 million in seed money, has plans to open a research center to tackle disease inequities among women.

The Vijayalakshmi Innovation Center in Women's Health Analytics and Research (VIHAR), announced Monday morning at Pitt Alumni Hall in Oakland, will use large-scale data analytics and artificial intelligence to inform its studies. The rollout to recruit board members to the virtual academic center has already begun.

"VIHAR will model the health trajectories of women and girls across every stage of life, capturing the richness of diverse ethnicities, environments, cultural and social contexts," said Vanathi Gopalakrishnan, associate professor in biomedical informatics at Pitt, during the announcement.

"This will elevate precision medicine to new inclusive heights," said Ms. Gopalakrishnan, who will serve as VIHAR's founding director. "The opportunities are limitless."

The center is largely driven by a donation from brother-sister entrepreneur duo Vishnu Vardhan and Harsha Vardhini, originally from India. The pair pioneered the

Texas-based startup Vizzy in 2021, which aims to use health data and AI to detect and prevent disease and to help people manage chronic illnesses. Pitt's School of Medicine matched the family's donation, earmarking a total \$20 million for the development of the center.

"This is the day when we begin a great adventure in creating the next level of AI-driven technologies for health sciences and the transformation of health care, which we believe Pitt is a leader [of] in the country," said Anantha Shekhar, dean of the Pitt School of Medicine and vice chancellor for health sciences. "This will be a global innovation center to reduce health disparities in women and improve health care for women across the globe."

The center is named after the Vizzy siblings' mother, Vijaya Lakshmi, who has diabetes and has suffered from health emergencies that inspired Dr. Vardhan and Ms. Vardhini to collaborate with and make the donation to Pitt.

The initial connection dates to June, when Ms. Gopalakrishnan gave a talk about her recent research findings at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay in Mumbai, India. Slides of her lecture caught the attention of Dr. Vardhan, who reached out to hear more.

Ms. Gopalakrishnan and



Benjamin B. Braun/Post-Gazette

Pitt Chancellor Joan Gabel, left, and Vanathi Gopalakrishnan talk Monday before an announcement of the founding of the Vijayalakshmi Innovation Center for Women's Health Analytics and Research.

her colleagues' research found that, from 2005 to 2022, postpartum hemorrhages have increased in women, with, by order of magnitude, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Asian, Native American and Black women most impacted.

That study is still awaiting peer review.

Vijaya Lakshmi had a postpartum hemorrhage while pregnant with Ms. Vardhini.

"She suffered greatly," Dr. Vardhan said. "Postpartum hemorrhage is very preventable, but it's still a major fac-

tor in maternal mortality for many reasons."

He said he saw an opportunity to build from Ms. Gopalakrishnan's research and use AI to scale up existing data, discover more widespread patterns and zoom in to identify specific risk factors an individual might face.

Part of the goal of the center will be to create what researchers call a "female digital twin": similar to how one might access their genome through 23andMe, but with more information such as imaging results, knowledge

about eating habits, neighborhood location and blood biomarkers. Researchers can then use this comprehensive information to simulate certain risk factors or disease models and see how the person might fare.

"Precision medicine is going to be the future of health care," Dr. Vardhan said. "We have all the technology now to really understand what goes on in the human body, and we can identify exactly what a person needs."

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Lawmakers protest Coast Guard cuts in Pittsburgh

Service blames staffing shortages

By Jonathan D. Salant
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WASHINGTON — Members of Western Pennsylvania's congressional delegation urged the Coast Guard Monday to restore staffing and maintain equipment levels at its Pittsburgh station, which has responsibility over the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers.

The lawmakers expressed concern over what they said was a "the reduction of Coast Guard personnel and the potential removal of equipment and vessels" at the station, located in Bridgeville. The station was emptied of personnel earlier this summer, including seven on active-duty and nine reservists sent to other units. Members and small boats were reassigned elsewhere.

"This decision will undoubtedly have steep economic costs for southwestern Pennsylvania," the lawmakers said in a letter to Adm. Linda Fagan, the Coast Guard commandant. "We must keep this waterway safe and navigable to protect the region's economy and way of life."

U.S. Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, D-Peters, led the effort and was joined by U.S. Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., and U.S. Reps. Glenn Thompson, R-Centre; Mike Kelly, R-Butler; Summer Lee, D-Swissvale; and Chris Deluzio, D-Aspinwall.

The Coast Guard did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The agency in March proposed temporarily pausing boat operations at the Pittsburgh facility and five other stations because of crew shortages.

According to the lawmakers, the station is responsible for 328 miles of navigable waterways, handles search and rescue operations, safeguards bridges and other infrastructure, protects the rivers from pollution and responds to natural disasters and threats.

Nippon says it will preserve Pennsylvania jobs

NIPPON, FROM A-1

the transaction originally agreed to in December 2023 approaches the end of a contentious regulatory review. President Joe Biden could make a decision by the end of the year, before the second term of President-elect Donald Trump, who has promised to kill the deal.

"Following continued constructive dialogue with Pennsylvania Governor Shapiro and others about the long-term needs of these facilities, Nippon Steel was happy to provide more specifics around our commitments in writing," the company said in a second letter shared with U.S. Steel employees on Monday.

The pledges include: \$200 million in expected added capital investments on top of the \$2.7 billion, a focus on increasing blast furnace efficiency, "furthering environmentally friendly operations," and twice a year consulting meetings with the USW. Nippon expects to finish two large projects — a hot mill replacement at Irvin and improvements at Gary Works



Lucy Schaly/Post-Gazette

Hiroshi Ono, left, president and CEO of NSNA, and Nippon Steel Vice Chairman Takahiro Mori hold up Homestead Grays jerseys given to them by West Mifflin Mayor Chris Kelly in his office garage on Nov. 19. Mr. Mori met with union head David McCall on a recent visit, but the United Steelworkers' leader remains opposed to Nippon's purchase of U.S. Steel.

in Indiana — by 2030. It will also consider reactivating the Gary tinplate mill, which was idled in 2022.

Mr. McCall was not swayed.

"It's time for this deal to be rejected," he said again last week, citing what he called "dire national and economic risks."

Gov. Josh Shapiro declined to take a public stance on the deal during a Dec. 3 event in Pittsburgh — highlighting how politically thorny the transaction remains, even after the November election.

In response to the letter, Shapiro spokesman Manuel Bonder said the governor "will continue to be actively

engaged in this process, working to bring the best offers to the table and strongly advocating for the interests of Western Pennsylvania and the workers of the region to ensure the future of American steelmaking runs through Pennsylvania."

Mr. Bonder added that "the final decision on this proposed deal will ultimately be made by the White House alone."

Analysts said winning the labor vote will be crucial to clearing regulatory approval, especially if that decision ultimately falls to Mr. Biden, who maintains a close relationship with USW's leader. So far, nothing has shifted Mr. McCall, who continues to favor a partnership with Ohio-based Cleveland-Cliffs — a proposal U.S. Steel rejected last fall because of monopoly concerns.

"It looks like Nippon put in writing everything that Mr. McCall wanted, [but] it might not matter," said Jason Zugai, president of the USW local in West Mifflin.

Negotiators for Nippon have been trying to break through Mr. McCall's intrans-

igence by winning over local union leaders and elected officials throughout Western Pennsylvania. A delegation last week traveled to Washington to meet with lawmakers and speak to a think tank about the benefits of foreign investment.

Some were originally concerned about Japanese ownership but came around once they heard Nippon's proposed investments and saw how the company operates existing factories in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Richard Tikey, vice president of the USW local in Clairton, told the Post-Gazette: "I really don't want a Japanese company owning us, but if they're going to keep job security and capital investments then yes, that's the way to go."

At least one worker was encouraged by the letter and meeting with Mr. McCall.

"Certainly a positive step in the right direction," said Andy Macey, maintenance technician at U.S. Steel Clairton and a member of USW Local 1557. "The rank and file continue on to help in the sale of U.S. Steel to Nippon."

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