

Grant Awarded to Black Lung Program

Regional Coal Miners Benefit

ALTOONA, Pa., July 13, 2017 – Former and current coal miners throughout the region will continue to receive diagnostic testing through the [UPMC Altoona](#) Black Lung Program's PA Black Lung COALition with the recent three-year award of an annual \$274,257 grant through 2020 from the [Health Resources and Services Administration](#) (HRSA).

Renee Henry, respiratory therapist and program director, and Katelyn Grados, respiratory therapist and compensation counselor, provide assistance to miners of all ages, working or retired in more than 50 Pennsylvania counties.

"I am proud to say that this is the 15th consecutive year that we have been given the capacity to assist in the health maintenance of the coal miners that have long been a mainstay of our regions' heritage," said Henry. "With data supporting a resurgence in black lung, especially in the general Appalachian area, we expect an increase in miners using the program."

"This is a competitive grant seeking federally allocated funding from HRSA," said Tim Balconi, president of the [UPMC Altoona Foundation](#), whose office submits the grant on behalf of the program.

"Congressman Bill Shuster, Senator John Eichelberger and Representative Judy Ward have personally been involved in supporting this grant funding process. Their political support combined with the outstanding clinical accomplishments of the program were key to winning a grant in the current funding environment as federal dollars are shrinking."

The Black Lung Program at UPMC Altoona partners with [Chan Soon-Shiong Medical Center](#) (formerly Windber Medical Center) and [Blue Mountain Health System](#) in the eastern portion of the state.

Working and newly hired coal miners can visit these clinics to receive base line screening and recommendations for follow-up and/or treatment, while retired miners receive screenings, assistance with applying for medical benefits, and treatment with a pulmonologist who has expertise specific to mining-related lung disease.