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GEORGIA LEADERS WORK TO IMPROVE CANCER CONTROL

ATLANTA (GA) – More than 35,000 cases of cancer will be diagnosed in Georgia this year – about 97 cases per day. Unfortunately, more than 14,950 Georgians are projected to die from the disease as well. With cancer serving as the second leading cause of death in Georgia, actions must be taken to reduce incidence rates, screen and detect the disease earlier and ensure healthcare providers meet or exceed national standards of cancer care. Diverse groups including the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health have collaborated with oncologists, cancer survivors and others statewide to revise Georgia’s Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan and tackle this issue head on.

“We recently met with oncology experts across the state to develop an updated roadmap for cancer control in Georgia over the next five years,” said Dr. Stuart Brown, Director of the Division of Public Health. “Based on collaborative input and using the best scientific evidence, we identified 16 goals with specific objectives to help us achieve comprehensive cancer control.”

The goals fall into five categories across the spectrum of cancer care. The categories include:

1. Prevention
2. Early detection and screening
3. Cancer diagnosis and staging
4. Treatment and palliation and
5. Data and metrics.

The prevention category focuses on the nearly two-thirds of cancer deaths that can be linked to modifiable risk factors such as tobacco use, diet, obesity and lack of physical activity. This category seeks to decrease tobacco use among Georgians and reduce the number of

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overweight and obese children. It will also target lessening the incidence of cervical cancer and the prevalence of the human papilloma virus (HPV).

The burden of cancer can be reduced significantly with appropriate use of mammography, colorectal screening and other early detection examinations. Yet, many Georgians do not have access to these preventive screening options. Removing barriers to cancer screening services is one of the primary focuses of the early detection and screening category. Other targets include increasing participation in recommended screenings for breast, colorectal, cervical and prostate cancers and improving the quality and effectiveness of cancer screening and follow-up services.

The third category, cancer diagnosis and staging, seeks progress in ensuring the timeliness and quality of acquisition, pathology and staging prior to cancer treatment and the uniformity and accuracy of documentation. Physicians, epidemiologists, cancer registrars and health care administrators served on the committee to identify this goal.

In treatment and palliation, the fourth category, ensuring hospital compliance with the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines is key. Other elements under this goal include: increasing the number of Georgians involved in cancer clinical trials and having palliative care available for a large proportion of cancer patients from the time of diagnosis.

The fifth and final category, data and metrics, will improve providers' knowledge and use of available public health data related to cancer. The committee suggests establishing ongoing and collaborative processes for addressing cancer data and metrics. The category seeks to also expand and enhance cancer data collection from existing and new sources and implement improved information management tools and technologies.

Changes to Georgia's Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan is the first step in combating cancer in the state. The Coalition's State Cancer Summit will meet with others involved with cancer care in Georgia on January 14-15, 2008 to discuss collaboration details for implementation of the plan.

Funding and support for Georgia's plan is provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Leadership was provided by DHR, the Department of Community Health and the Georgia Cancer Coalition. The Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University facilitated the process.

For more information about cancer control in Georgia, please visit:
www.georgiacancer.org or call (404) 651- 6611.